

THE ROMESH SHARMA CASE: AN UPDATE

SUNDAY



*Uranium has brought
destruction and death to
Jaduguda in Bihar. And no
one cares*

Letters.....	4
Sight and Sound.....	6
Profile.....	26
Spotlight.....	30
Sunday Sports.....	58
News.....	59
Sunday Week.....	63
Business Diary.....	64
Random Notes.....	65
Delhi Diary.....	66



BUSINESS

Think fad

IBM launches its latest notebook computer for the Indian mum with a pram. But will she buy it?.....28

COLUMNS

THE SOUTH BLOCK
Inder Malhotra

MANI-TALK
Mani Shankar Aiyar

POWER PLAY
Rajiv Shukla

Cover transparency: Sk. Azizur Rahman

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COVER STORY 32

Waiting to die

Uranium has brought destruction and death to Jaduguda in Bihar. And no one cares



NEWSWATCH 18

Under the heel

Tamil Nadu politics takes an ugly turn

SPECIAL REPORT 11

The plot thickens

The Romesh Sharma case: an update

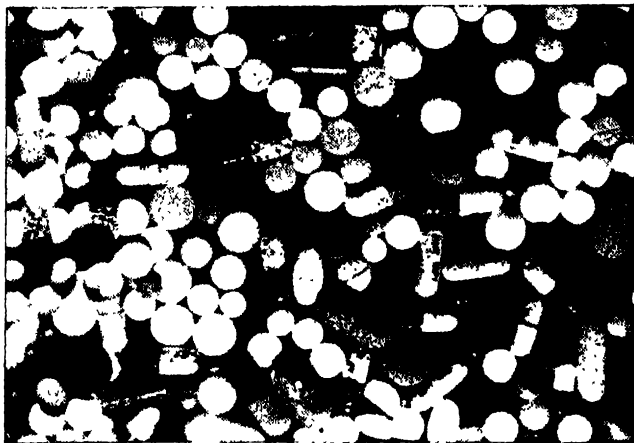




Potion fashion

I was impressed by the cover story on pills (*Killjoy*, 21—27 March). Unlike the Sixties and Seventies when the people still believed in naturopathy and the virtues of yoga, more and more people nowadays tend to depend on artificial drugs and other such ingredients to lose weight and increase their sex appetite.

But then one cannot blame the new generation. With so much pollution in the environment and ever-increasing use of fertilisers in producing grains and vege-



A file picture of pills: how dependent are we on them?

tables, human beings no longer are as healthy and potent as they used to be some decades back. Moreover, a recent statistics presented by the WHO shows that there is a discernible fall in fertility rate among the Indians.

The scenario is very bleak. With so many people

getting hooked onto drugs, it won't be long before they become immune to these pills. This syndrome is existent in developed countries like the United States too.

Bimal Chaudhury, Calcutta (West Bengal)

■ Your cover story on pill power made an interesting reading. The only way out for the people addicted to pills is to go for consultation with the shrinks — a class of medicos, whose practice is increasing day by day in the West. And going by the trend prevailing now, India will produce more psychiatrists than specialists in other departments of medicine in the years to come.

Seema Trehan, Bombay (Maharashtra)

Bleak future

This refers to the story *Taking stock* (7—13 March). I was a sports administrator for more than four decades, and my last assignment was as convenor of Santosh Trophy 1992 at Coimbatore.

A huge amount of sponsorship money is collected to conduct tournaments like the Nehru Trophy, National League, Federation Cup and Santosh Trophy. The sponsorship budget now is 2000% more than what it was in 1992. But, the sponsors are now opting out of the sponsorship and are withdrawing from it because of AIFF only.

Apart from the sponsors, Asian Football Federation, and FIFA also give considerable amount of money to conduct football tournaments in India. This amount is supposed to be spent for the promotion of football in India. In spite of all this, our national football team's performance in the Asian Games has been dismal.

In fact, the present situation of the AIFF is deplorable. Unless a thorough change of administrators and office-bearers is done, the Indian football will have a bleak future.

V. Gangadharan, Coimbatore (Tamil Nadu)

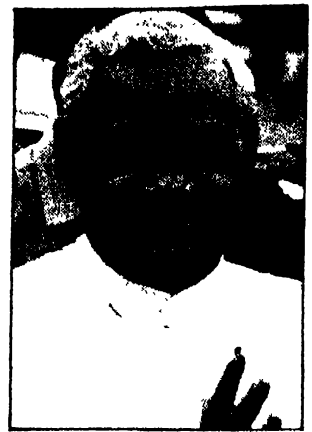
PM is right

It was inconceivable why the columnist was reluctant to give credit to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's efforts at improving Indo-Pak relations (*Tyre burst*, 14—20 March).

There is no gainsaying the fact that the cross-border bus service will help in thawing the near-freezing bilateral relations and make the atmosphere more congenial for further talks between the two countries.

Nallini Sudhakaran, Trivandrum (Kerala)

■ Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee created history when he made the bus trip to Wagha. He has said that history can be changed but geography cannot be changed. True, we can choose our



A.B. Vajpayee: going great guns

friends but not our neighbours. In fact, Vajpayee is a right man in a wrong party. **Md. Tanweer, Calcutta (West Bengal)**

Diva's desire

Melody queen Lata Mangeshkar who has sung over 20,000 songs and won more awards than she cares to remember has only one regret — she could not seriously take up classical singing (*Lata*, 14—20 March).

The reason why she did not give up singing was to make a late foray into classical music. Lata also desires to sing *slokas* from *Bhagwat Gita* as well as compositions from Kabir, Surdas and Tulsidas. That is the only vacuum in her career. **Priya Kumar, Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh)**

Friendly gesture

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee deserves kudos for his track-II diplomacy and the bus trip to Pakistan (*Seize the moment*, 28 February—6 March). This initiative has come as a great relief to the people of both the countries. We now hope that this will further strengthen the ties between the two nations.

For millions of people

who have lived in undivided India, Vajpayee's gesture was unique. However, what I didn't like was his visit to Minar-e-Pakistan.

N. Lakshmi, Madras (Tamil Nadu)

To Madam with love

This refers to the story *The lady in question* (21—27 March). The appointment of Surabhi Banerjee (biographer of Jyoti Basu) as the pro-vice chancellor (academic) in Calcutta University may have raised eyebrows, but the CPI(M) has hardly failed to appoint its loyalists in top academic posts. While the pro-VC's post is decided by the vice chancellor of the university and is then recommended by him to the chancellor, but in practice the selection is to a great extent manipulated by the Marxist apparatchiks.

Whether Surabhi Banerjee is competent enough to be the pro-vice chancellor is not the key issue here. The question is whether Surabhi Banerjee would ever have made it to the esteemed office but for the alleged intervention of Jyoti Basu or the CPI(M). Any attempt to search for this answer will reveal how politicised school, college and university administration is in West Bengal.

S.N. Rai, Darjeeling (West Bengal)

Let truth prevail

The columnist's frustration with the BJP rule at the Centre is quite understandable (*The moral right to rule*, 7—13 March). Although the Congressmen like him keep on predicting that the BJP-led government will collapse within months, nothing of that sort happens.

True, the Vajpayee government has suffered



Jyoti Basu: rues lack of work culture

several crises. But the BJP has deftly tackled them. Hence, the doubting Thomases' frustration. The BJP government's tenacity to carry on with Mamata, Samata and Jayalalitha has thrown a spanner to the Opposition's attempt to topple the Vajpayee government.

Although the columnist prays that the Vajpayee ministry should close shop, but the people still have faith in the central government as the man at the helm has an impeccable character.

The columnist tried to give a clean chit to Rajiv Gandhi in the Bofors case, quot-

ing Joginder Singh, the ex-CBI director. Why doesn't he quote other former CBI directors who held different views on the Bofors issue? Let Quattrocchi be brought to India. And let him spill the beans. And let the truth prevail.

N. Prasad, Jhansi (Bihar)

Work order

This refers to the column headlined *Strike them hard* (28 February—6 March). Professional trade union leaders, who act in an irresponsible manner by calling unwarranted strikes and

resort to walk-outs, are doing a great disservice to the nation.

At a time when our country is facing an economic recession, the militant trade union movement, unless checked, will ruin the country's economy further. The trade union militancy has not only led to closure of several private companies but has also brought down the productivity in many public sector units.

In fact, the most important fallout of trade unionism is that it has ruined the work culture. And this has been admitted by none other than chief minister Jyoti Basu himself.

Gajendra Varadhan, Thanjavur (Tamil Nadu)

Sonia's choice

The Vajpayee government at the Centre may be living on borrowed time (*Who will count*, 14—20 March). But it is most unlikely that the Congress will come to



Sonia Gandhi: wants fresh faces in the party

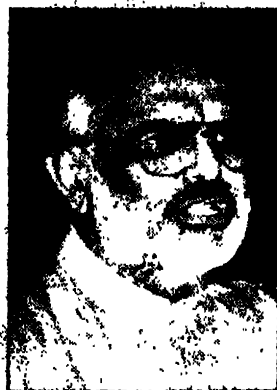
power with a coalition of similar allies.

Should the Congress come to power, Sonia Gandhi would surely prefer to have a team of young leaders. And in that case, several old Machiavellians would be dropped.

A. Jacob Sahayam, Vellore (Tamil Nadu)

SEPARATED AT BIRTH?

A PRIZE RS 200 FOR CONTRIBUTORS



Sushil Singh Verma
Politician



Mahesh Chandra Mehta
Technician

Contributed by Sathana Dasgupta, Calcutta (West Bengal)

MILESTONES

ANNOUNCED: by the external affairs ministry, easing of visa and travel restrictions for seven categories of Pakistani nationals. Effective from 2 April, the relaxations cover, among others, judges, editors, cricket and hockey players, MPs and leaders of provincial Assemblies.

APPOINTED: Hemant Bharat Ram of DCM Data Systems as president of the Manufacturers Association for Information Technology (MAIT).

DIED: Ananda Shankar, 56, music composer, in Calcutta on 26 March. Son of legendary dancer Uday Shankar and nephew of sitar maestro

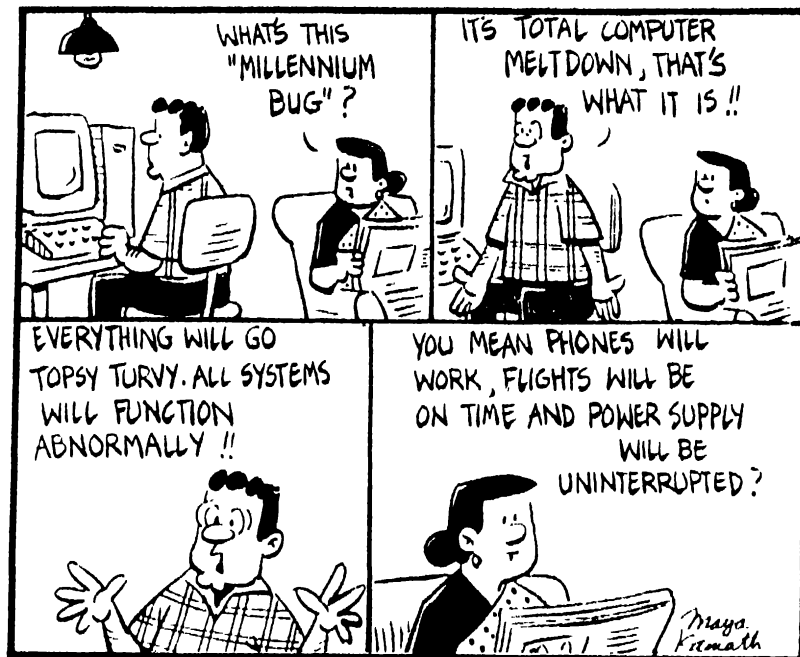


Ravi Shankar, he gave a new dimension to instrumental music, fusing the East with the West.

DERECOGNISED: the Samata Party by the Election Commission as a national party, on 24 March, because of its performance in last year's elections.

LAUNCHED: the Asia News Network, by *The Jakarta Post* (Indonesia), *The Star* and *Sin Chew Jit Poh* (Malaysia), *The Manila Times* (Philippines), *The Straits Times* (Singapore), *The Nation* (Thailand), *Vietnam News* (Vietnam) and *The Statesman* (India). ANN will exchange news, features, editorial comments and op-eds on a daily basis.

SIGHT & SOUND



MAYA KAMATHI/THE ASIAN AGE

■ I think Sonia Gandhi has the legitimate and natural right to head the government.

SHARAD PAWAR, leader of the Opposition in Parliament, ruling himself out of the race for prime ministership should the Congress get a chance to form the government

■ I am not going to retire, although I am ageing.

JYOTI BASU, West Bengal chief minister, on reports saying that he may quit on his next birthday

■ Earlier we never worshipped any god. But now we worship Ram.

BURKI SOREN, a tribal in Popra, Malda, where the Bajrang Dal and the VHP 'reconverted' about 500 tribals to Hinduism



■ This is not a painting to decorate a drawing room. It's for the people who suffer.

M. F. HUSAIN, artist, on his 13-metre canvas, *Violence*, at the two-artist show, *Darkness At Noon*, at Gallery 7 in Colaba, Bombay

■ ... Which part of heaven is the VHP offering the tribals? This is a question lurking in many a tribal heart.

FATHER VERGHESE, priest, Roman Catholic church in Malda, on the VHP-organised 'reconversion' ceremony

■ It was just not our day.

MOHAMMED AZHARUDDIN, Indian captain, after India lost to Pakistan by 143 runs in the Jaipur one-dayer

■ Of course I have always been jealous, but only in the subconscious.

ZOHRA SEHGAL, actress, about her sister Usha Butt. The two return as septuagenarian siblings in Suhid Nadeem's play *Eik Thi Nani*

Second Vietnam?

The US-led NATO airstrikes on Kosovo could prove costly



Under the dictates of the United States, the recently-enlarged NATO has mounted an attack on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Yugoslavia. It is a mindless, indeed monstrous, exercise. Understandably, it has invited vehement denunciation and opposition from Russia, China, India and many other countries. Apparently fore-

warned by the criticism of its earlier silence on NATO's expansion, the Indian government spoke out rather speedily against what NATO has done in the Yugoslav Federation. But the official statement is mild compared to the anger among those Indians who know what Kosovo is all about and how dangerous the implications and ramifications of the US-led NATO action are.

To say this is not to slur over what President Slobodan Milosevic of Yugoslavia has been doing in Kosovo, the part of Serbia inhabited overwhelmingly by people of Albanian ethnicity who are also Muslims, as against the Serbs who are mostly Christians of the Russian orthodox faith. Milosevic's brutal suppression of the Kosovars, in the name of flushing out the secessionist Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), is reprehensible, indeed execrable. It has got to be stopped.

However, the way to do so is for the UN Security Council to take charge of the situation and devise effective ways that would protect the lives and autonomy of Kosovars without eroding Yugoslav sovereignty and unity. For the US, acting as the self-appointed supercop of the whole world and using NATO as its handmaiden to take up the task, runs foul of international law and morality and is, therefore, unacceptable, never mind President Bill Clinton's overblown rhetoric about his action being driven by both "moral imperative" and American national interest. The United Nations' efficacy has been gravely damaged in the past. The present blow to it is even more shattering, as a saddened UN secretary-general, Kofi Annan, has been constrained to admit.

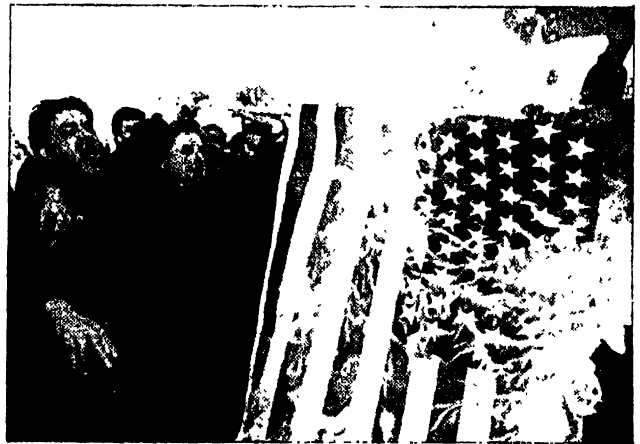
No one should underestimate the serious consequences of NATO's air strikes on Serbia, including Kosovo, in terms of a sharp deterioration in America's relations with Russia at a time when support to Russia's collapsing economy should have been priority number one. It is a measure of the strong Russian outrage that the Russian Prime Minister, Yevgeny Primakov, on way to Washington, turned his plane back to Moscow when the news of the planned NATO strikes came in. For more than 45 minutes, Clinton pleaded with Boris Yeltsin on the telephone not to oppose America's arrogant action but to no avail.

China's condemnation of the US and the NATO is no less strong. Even before NATO Cruise missiles and bombs started hitting targets in Belgrade and the Kosovo capital Priotina, Beijing was aggrieved by America's decision to embark on Theatre Missile Defence (TMD) covering Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. It has threatened countervailing measures such as a further upgrading of Chinese missiles. The possibili-

ty of China retaliating by embarking on, once again, nuclear and missile proliferation also cannot be ruled out. All this has clear security implications for India.

There is a similarity of what the US has been doing in Iraq (there at least it has a fig-leaf cover of the UN) and what it has started in Yugoslavia. But even Americans admit that Milosevic's ability to fight back is much greater than Saddam Hussein's. There are bound to be casualties among American airmen. And the bombing operation will have to be much longer and much more extensive than the usual spurts in Iraq are.

Clinton has clearly ruled out the induction of ground troops except as peace-keepers in the event Milosevic, after taking a beating, realises that he has to let Kosovo go, like so many other parts of former Yugoslavia. This could turn out to be wishful thinking. In fact, the situation could take an ironic



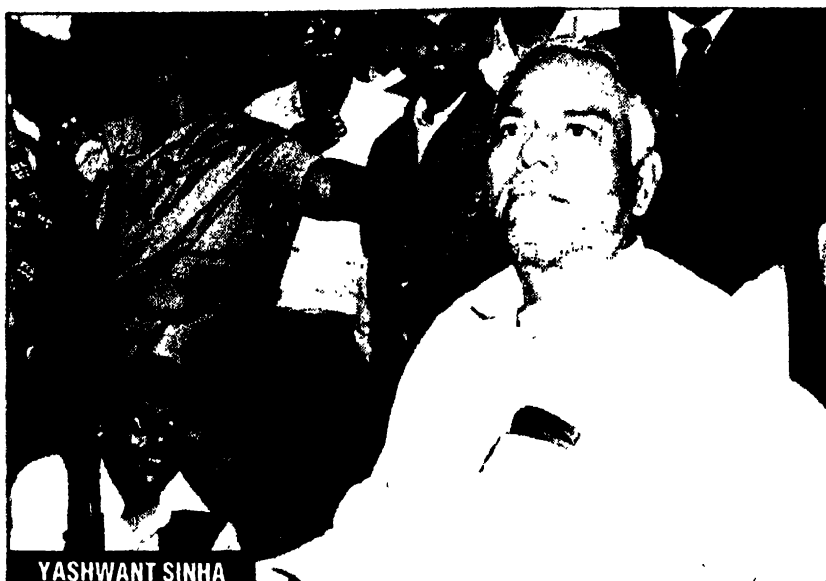
Serbs from Macedonia cheer as they set an American flag on fire outside the US Embassy in Skopje as a mark of protest against the NATO airstrikes

twist. As in Vietnam (and, to an extent, in Iraq) the Americans might find themselves sinking in a morass.

If Kosovo is 90 per cent Albanian, it is also the "holy ground" and the "birth place" of the Serb ethnicity, as the state-controlled television in Belgrade proclaims everyday. The total unanimity in the Yugoslav National Assembly on resisting the stationing of foreign troops in Kosovo also has a message of its own. Especially, in the context of the Serbs' reputation as fighters all through their history.

Surprisingly, no one offers Milosevic a truly neutral peace-keeping force under the flag of the UN. He has good reason to believe that a three-year stay in Kosovo of 25,000 NATO troops, including 4,000 American GIs, would be a short-cut to Kosovo's autonomy turning into secession.

Let America and its obedient allies face the consequences of their reckless action. But the international community has to see to it that Kosovo does not become a precedent. As Henry Kissinger has asked: "How often and how far will NATO become an engine for promoting ethnic secession?" •

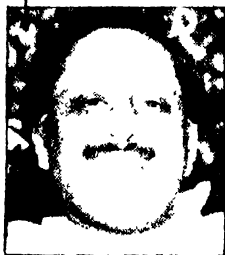


YASHWANT SINHA

focussed on ITC and the burgeoning Indian tobacco products market for years. They are trying to buy their way back to the controlling interest they had when ITC stood not for Indian Tobacco Company but Imperial Tobacco Company. I grew up with the generation that flashed tins of 555, wore ties through the sultry Calcutta summer, cultivated chichi accents, and foregathered at clubs and chic restaurants for the hours of mid-day drinking that, under the flag (Union Jack, old boy) passed for executive business in the grosser Victorian monstrosities on Chowringhee and streets off. So, I well remember when ITC was Imperial and "covenanted" Brown Sahibs ("Not Jamshed, ol' chap, Jimmy to you") went "home" on leave — to seedy hotels in Kensington and Chiswick. That was when the Queen was in Buckingham Palace and all was well with the world

There is no proposal in my ministry, Sinha thundered to a Rajya Sabha emptied of an Opposition, for BAT to buy out the UTI stake in ITC

A Guruswamy



Yashwant Sinha denied it all. There is no proposal in my ministry, he thundered to a Rajya Sabha emptied of an Opposition, for British American Tobacco (BAT) to buy

out the Unit Trust of India (UTI) stake in India Tobacco Company (ITC). Of course, there would not be. Multinationals trading on Dalal Street do not apply for permission to the finance ministry to buy and sell. Nor do they advertise their intention to undertake a management takeover. They operate silently through friends of friends and, far more important, friends of important relatives.

But as this is a democracy (at least until the Sangh Parivar gets an absolute majority) the truth will out. *Business*

Standard reported in the second week of December that BAT was readying itself for an off-market bid that would simultaneously solve UTI's horrendous liquidity problem and give BAT its long-sought-after management control of ITC. Sinha's ingenuous denials notwithstanding, alarm bells were set off by that report in North Block. As they should have been. For it has long been our policy not to encourage management takeovers of well run Indian companies by predatory multinationals. A government, moreover, sworn, however falsely, to *swadeshi* can hardly ignore a *videshi* attempt to *videshise* a *swadeshi* — or, at least, "educate" itself through the attempt as the Shiv Sena-BJP have done with Enron's ("throw it into the Arabian Sea") Dabhol project.

The finance minister may claim virgin innocence but ask anyone, ask K.L. Chugh, for instance, and we all know that BAT's avaricious eyes have been

— or at least those bits of it shaded a fading red.

THEN CAME INDIRA Gandhi. She drove the boxwallah businesses into Indianising themselves. Imperial Tobacco was a prime victim. It diluted its foreign equity, replaced "Imperial" with a nostalgic 'I', and even made a *namaste* its logo for "Welcome". Now, alas, that we are getting past our East India Company-complex, in the name of what I am told goes by the acronym of PLG, that is, Privatisation, Liberalisation, Globalisation, the jackals are creeping back into the village, BAT among them.

One can hardly blame the tobacco multinationals for eyeing the Indian market with the customary smacking of their greedy lips. Back home, the surgeon-general's warning that Smoking Is Bad For Your Health is not only seriously limiting the growth of demand but even leading to law suits

through which relatives of victims of tobacco-related deaths are securing compensation running to millions of dollars from tobacco companies that work through our brief passage on earth as the agents of Yama. Not even Bill Clinton's endeavours to find interesting new uses for cigars has helped the tobacco industry much.

The developing countries are, therefore, the target. In the Third World, surgeons-general little care about the health of multinational victims and courts will not act till one day, *Inshallah*, judicial activism takes it into its eccentric head to do something, anything. Meanwhile, there are big bucks to be made slowly squeezing the fresh air out of a billion lungs.

And thus it came about, or so Guruswamy informs us, that one Deepak Talwar made friends with one Anil Bakht, offspring by pure coincidence of the BJP's minister of industry. Talwar did what he could to foster the idea of Rothman's, a BAT groupie, setting up shop in India to manufacture their brand of cigarettes, but finance said it would be impossible to distinguish between domestic and imported Rothmans leading to a customs scam of the first magnitude. The proposal was shelved, but not, it would seem, Deepak Talwar. For he had discovered, or so says Guruswamy, an alternative avenue for his entrepreneurial skills. Which was to marry the interests of the Unit Trust of India, headed by his old friend Subramanyam, to the global interests



MOHAN GURUSWAMY

With a track record of placing himself at the centre of any stage, he gave an account of his deathless role in saving UTI from the ravages of FILs

Primer-III

BATS IN THE BELFRY

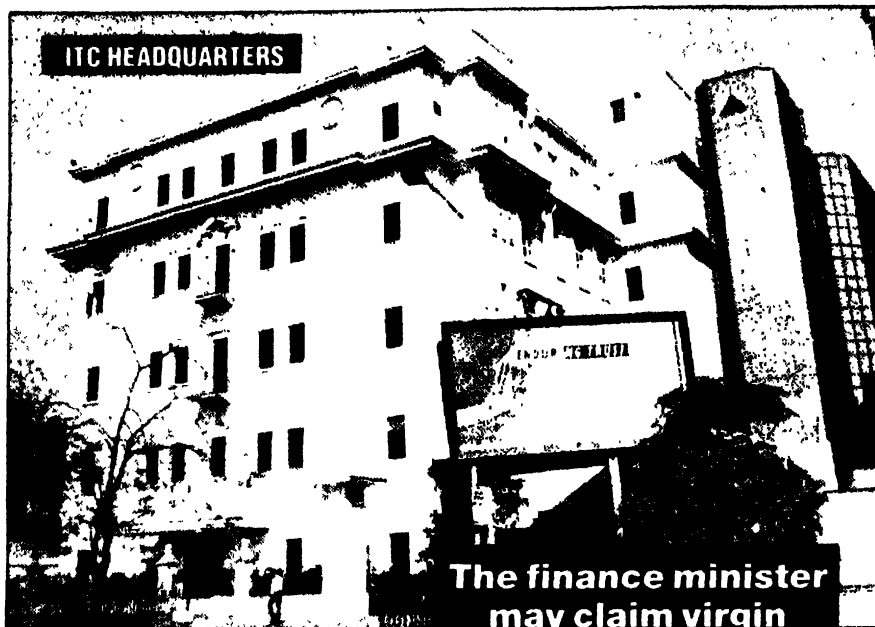
of his principals, BAT.

SUBRAMANYAM DENIES HE was ever a chum of Talwar's and Talwar denies he was ever an agent of BAT's and BAT denies it was ever interested in taking over ITC. But these denials need not long detain us here. They should be the object of an investigation by a JPC. Meanwhile, back to Guruswamy. The records, on investigation by a JPC, will show that on 18 December, Guruswamy took the morning flight to Bombay and returned by an afternoon flight the same day. He says he drove straight to the coffee shop at the Oberoi Towers, where he was joined by the chairman of UTI. That the chairman of UTI should have responded with alacrity to the "adviser's" summons has a history to it. When a run started on US-64, both the Prime Minister and finance minister were out of the country. Guruswamy rushed down to Bombay, arranged with the Reserve



SIKANDAR BAKHT: Guruswamy informs us, that Deepak Talwar made friends with Anil Bakht, offspring by pure coincidence of the BJP's minister of industry; Talwar did what he could to foster the idea of Rothman's, a BAT groupie, setting up shop in India to manufacture their brand of cigarettes, but finance said it would be impossible to distinguish between domestic and imported Rothmans leading to a customs scam of the first magnitude; the proposal was shelved, but not Talwar

Bank of India finances of Rs 4,000 crore to be made available to UTI, and had *pan-dals* set up at every UTI office to honour any units submitted for redemption by the investing public. The crisis was overcome, and although UTI's basic liquidi-



ITC HEADQUARTERS



K. L. CHUGH

The finance minister may claim virgin innocence but ask anyone, ask K.L. Chugh, for instance, and we all know that BAT's avaricious eyes have been focussed on ITC and the burgeoning Indian tobacco products market for years

ty problems had, in fact, got aggravated, confidence in its solvency had been restored.

Given Guruswamy's track record of placing himself at the centre of any stage, his account of his deathless role in saving UTI from the ravages of foreign institutional investors (FIIs) would probably merit a more modest evaluation by history, but it was sufficient to persuade the head of UTI to motor over to the Oberoi Towers. There, says Guruswamy, he administered Subramanyam the ticking off of his life. Reports, said he sternly, had reached the ears of the high and the mighty that Subramanyam had been seen dallying with the notorious Talwar — and that the implications of this for a BAT purchase of UTI's ITC holdings should be well understood by UTI before it succumbed to multinational wooing. The UTI holding 5.6 per cent of ITC stock, it is said, is hardly a humungous share but just enough to put BAT in the driver's seat at ITC and end the blocking power of the financial institutions. A chastened UTI promised, we are told, to behave with circumspection.

Which is what led to the curious episode of the MPs' representation to the Prime Minister, which Yashwant Sinha presented as his first piece of evidence for the defence on opening his innings in the Rajya Sabha. A most curious document. Dated 12 January — weeks after Guruswamy's intervention with UTI — it was actually delivered at PMO/H only on 5 March, but not before its contents had already been printed in the papers (*The Economic Times* has been cited). At least two alleged signatories — Kishore Chandra Deo (Congress, Rajya Sabha) and Amar Roy Pradhan (AIFB, Lok Sabha) have refuted the authenticity of their signatures on the floor of Parliament. Sinha was thus not able to turn the tables on the Congress as he had hoped to with this strange mischievous, but it had in the meanwhile become a *cause celebre* and the immediate provocation for Guruswamy's exit from the government.

THE LETTER DREW attention to UTI's liquidity problems and urged that government should not come in the way of UTI unloading its ITC holdings on the market. The letter made no mention of BAT, but since the only party interested in buying over the whole lot — lock, stock and barrel, as the saying goes — was BAT, and Guruswamy's intervention to halt UTI in its tracks, against which the letter complained, had been entirely BAT-oriented, Guruswamy saw the hand of Talwar when its contents were published on 18 January, six weeks before the destined recipient spotted it on his mailbox.

Guruswamy then penned his celebrated note of 21 January saying that if against all *swadeshi* principles UTI was going to be left to sell its ITC holdings, the right price and quantity must be at least three times what was being bruited about. That would have jacked up BAT's contribution to "kick-starting" the economy (the phrase is Yashwant Sinha's) from a modest Rs 1,000 crore to a cool Rs 9,000 crore. The finance minister, who now says there was no proposal before his ministry, did not then ask Guruswamy why he was intervening in matters that were none of the business of the finance ministry; he asked him to "discuss"; then postponed the discussion, giving Guruswamy occasion to sound out Subramanyam and claim that chairman, UTI, and he were of the same mind; at which the finance minister, who now insists he was uninvolved, once again asked Guruswamy to "discuss" but, says Guruswamy, was asked by Friends of BAT, stretching from PMO/H across the gamut of babudom and the FIs, to get rid of his "adviser", not reason with him. The dismissal of Guruswamy, says Guruswamy, became inelectable once he, Guruswamy, had refused a sweetener of Rs 12 crore put on offer, says Old G, by the egregious Deepak Talwar.

Guruswamy's papers, including the private diary in which he made notes contemporaneous with his five minutes of fame, have been seized by the finance ministry. They hold many keys to these murky goings-on. Only a JPC can access them and match them against the official record, calling those involved to the witness box to testify on oath. That is the way to discover whether the BJP-led government has gone out of its mind or, as the *videshi* expression has it, got bats in its belfry. •



A quake-hit site at Chamoli: death in the Himalayas

AFF

The Himalayan tragedy

When the people of Chamoli and Rudraprayag districts in the Garhwal hills, Uttar Pradesh, retired to their homes at the end of the day's work on 28 March, it never occurred to them that none of them would live to see the light the next morning. At 12.40 am, a series of tremors, lasting close to 40 seconds, buried all of them alive — as walls and roofs of their houses came crashing down under the impact of the earthquake.

Measuring 6.8 on the Richter scale, with its epicentre at Nandiprayag, 10 kilometre from Chamoli, the earthquake had the highest intensity in recent times. It was more severe than the earthquake in Uttarkashi (6.6) in 1991, Latur (6.3) and Jabalpur (6.0). Like the one in Uttarkashi, the earthquake occurred in 'Zone 5' of the seismic belt, which is classified as 'very quake prone'. The last earthquake at Chamoli in 1996 measured 4.5 on the Richter scale.

Coming close on the heels of the devastating landslide in August 1998, which killed several Mansarovar pilgrims in Pithoragarh and Rudraprayag, another Himalayan tragedy has struck the Garhwal hills in northern UP again.

The tragedy struck the neighbouring Gopeshwar, Joshimath and Jhakoli areas. The earthquake that engulfed almost the whole of north and west Uttar

An earthquake at Chamoli leaves behind a trail of death and destruction

Pradesh left more than 100 dead and 300 injured. Within the next 12 hours, rescue teams evacuated as many as 85 dead bodies from the debris of collapsed houses. "Yes, those killed were victims of house collapse," said Shridhar Pathak, the superintendent of police.

Chief secretary Yogendra Narain, who called a meeting of high officials at his residence, promptly pressed the army and air force into rescue service. "Fortunately, this is not the pilgrimage season; otherwise Hindu devotees who throng to Badrinath and Kedarnath shrines in the upper reaches of Rudraprayag district would have suffered," he said.

When contacted over telephone at about 3.30 am, Shridhar Pathak said, "This is the tenth tremor I have felt just now." Later in the afternoon, local residents talked of experiencing over 20 tremors. The earthquake was so severe that cracks were seen on mountains and roads. In fact, about 90 per cent of houses in Gopeshwar collapsed.

Though rescue teams were pressed

into service, not much headway could be made until the first light of dawn illuminated the affected terrain located at a height of about 5,500 feet above sea level. "Since many parts of Chamoli were inaccessible due to absence of motorable roads, it would take time before we could gauge the extent of the damage to human life and property," said the chief secretary. Moreover, the rescue operation was hampered by a series of landslides the tremors had triggered, blocking roadlinks and snapping telecommunication and power lines.

However, experts do not find the phenomenon to be unexpected. "Chamoli falls in the well-identified seismic zone in the Himalayan region," says Dr A.K. Tangri, a scientist at the Lucknow-based Remote Sensing Application Centre.

Attributing earthquakes in the Himalayan region to the geological movements inside the earth's crust, he explained how the northward movement of the Indian Tectonic Plates that was moving gradually under the Eurasian Plates was primarily causing earthquakes in the region. "It is this movement which began nearly 200 million years ago as a result of collision between the two plates that gave rise to the Himalayas some 40 million years back," he pointed out. •

Sharat Pradhan/Lucknow

*Kunjum Budhiraja's
murder gives a new
twist to the Romesh
Sharma case*

The plot

For Delhi's land-grab king Romesh Sharma, freedom was just a few bails away. By the beginning of March 1999, of the 16 cases against him, Sharma had managed to get bail in eight. The other charges against him — of being a part-time politician, fixer and pimp — were too frivolous to keep him behind bars for too long. Sharma was champing at the bit. The frontman for the Dubai-based don, Dawood Ibrahim, was aware that in just a few days he would walk. His enemies, those who had squealed on him were bracing themselves for the punishment Sharma would mete out when he came out.

Around the middle of March, some people close to Romesh Sharma were surprised to get a call from him. He was calling on a cellphone, he said (oblivious to the irony) with the obliging assistance of a jail warden who had 'lent' a telephone to him (the cellphone was taken away from Sharma after four days when the police discovered he'd been using it).

Sharma sounded as if he was under tremendous financial pressure. It was clear that the jail, lawyers and enforcement agencies had taken a heavy toll of his financial fortunes. Close relatives and other "trusted lieutenants" in whose names Romesh had parked his properties and funds were not coughing up. He told his friends he feared he would be penniless by the time he walked out of Tihar.

Kunjum Budhiraja, 29, fashion designer and sister of fellow-traveller and prison mate Navin, was perhaps the only one who had Romesh's confidence. Most of the grabbed properties of Sharma had Kunjum as their owner. Attractive and ambitious, Kunjum had all the makings of a gangster's moll.

Kunjum was trusting, beautiful — light-eyed and dusky-skinned — and completely amoral. Like others of her kind, she drew her strength from the criminality of the person she hung around with. When Romesh was arrested for not returning the helicopter of Bombay-based businessman Suresh Rao, Kunjum was the one police interrogated tho-



Kunjum Budhiraja: fatal attraction

roughly. Her house was raided.

She was the one weak link which police thought they could smash and get to Sharma. She was invaluable for Sharma as well as for the police. For those who had participated in illegal enterprises with Sharma, she spelt danger, in capital letters.

On 19 March, Kunjum's brother met

Romesh in Tihar. Could you ask Kunjum to go to the farmhouse and do puja at the temple, Sharma asked her brother. It was Navratra, the fortnight of fasting leading to Ram Navami, an auspicious time to pray for release.

On 19 March, Romesh Sharma's nephew, Surendra Mishra, spoke to the caretaker at the Jai Mata Di farmhouse,

thickens



Romesh Sharma: could he have any motive for killing Kunjum?

asking him to expect Kunjum the following morning. Surendra, a roughneck, also left behind some goons. Significantly, the caretaker did not object.

As desired by Romesh, Kunjum turned up at the farmhouse on 20 March. Ram Achal Tewari, the caretaker, took her to the temple which hadn't been used at all since Romesh had gone to jail and

was dusty. Kunjum was cleaning the idols and while she was moving around, four people accosted her. A little perturbed at this but still suspecting nothing, Kunjum told the intruders to get lost. One of them slapped her. The other quickly slid behind her and held her arms back. The third drew out his knife and slit her throat. She was stabbed a

couple of times for good measure. Then they left her dead on the floor, got into a waiting car and drove away.

That's how Ram Achal Tewari found Kunjum Budhiraja on the floor. He called the police and charged Surendra with the crime. Surendra was found absconding. Amazingly, he was caught two days later at Ahmedabad — obviously betrayed by those who had promised to provide him sanctuary.

Surendra was put through the wringer and he began to sing like a canary. He insisted that his uncle, Romesh, had contracted him to kill Kunjum. Surendra also blurted out that two *rakhi* sisters of Romesh — the Viridi sisters — were also party to the heinous murder.

According to police sources, Surendra was extremely lucid when it came to establishing Romesh's hand in the crime. These sources say they have recovered two notes, in Romesh's handwriting, instructing Surendra to request Kunjum to go to the Jai Mata Di farmhouse and perform Navratra puja.

Romesh seemed obsessed with the idea that Kunjum come to the farmhouse and pray at the temple. From Surendra's interrogation, the police have found no motive to link Romesh with Kunjum's killing.

However, that Romesh was obsessed with Kunjum was clear. He insisted that he attend her funeral and went to the extent of 'marrying' her dead body, going through all the rituals associated with the cremation of a *suhagin* (married woman) including rubbing *sindur* in the parting of her hair and leaving red bangles on her pyre. He wept inconsolably.

Kunjum's murder and Surendra's testimony to the Delhi Police has added a new twist to the murky scandal.

The big question that is puzzling everyone is: Romesh Sharma was on the verge of getting out of Tihar. He would have rejoined Kunjum and regained control of her. Then why have her killed? Was it Sharma who got her killed or someone else who felt that Kunjum knew too much? Was it obsessive love that brought death to Kunjum, or jealousy, or fear?

The police have forwarded some theories. Some are clearly not workable. Others might form the basis of further investigation.

The most popular ones are as follows:

- Surendra killed Kunjum as he feared

she would gobble up all Romesh's properties.

This is plausible, but it doesn't address the central issue: *Romesh Sharma was coming out*. Who better than him to control Kunjum? In any case, by killing Kunjum, Surendra would get nothing. So why spend all that money on hiring four killers, when the person he needed to knock off first was Romesh Sharma followed by Kunjum?

- Romesh Sharma got Kunjum killed because she had become demanding and he had stopped trusting her.

It is hard to believe this. At least while she was alive, Sharma had some hold over his properties. With Kunjum dead, how could anyone be prevented from taking away what had belonged to him and Kunjum? And how could Kunjum

Kunjum Budhiraja, 29, a light-eyed and dusky-skinned fashion designer, was perhaps the only one who had Romesh's confidence

have become demanding when Sharma was in jail? If he'd really wanted her dead, he could have done the deed himself after he came out. It is not as if Kunjum was the key to the police for some

secret that would have led to an extension of Sharma's jail term.

- Romesh got Kunjum killed to prevent her from being a witness against him in the more serious cases.

If that were to have happened, it would have happened by now.

- Kunjum was killed by some of those who were partners in Romesh's illegal schemes. They feared that Kunjum would expose them before the police if things got too hot.

This is the most plausible theory. There were many who knew that it would be impossible to reach Kunjum once Romesh came out. She had to be killed now and it had to be done fast. The role of the Viridi sisters in the murder is still being investigated, but the police

Points of enquiry

The police are trying to establish whether Kunjum was killed because she was demanding more money from Romesh Sharma, who was in jail, or because she was a witness against him in the more serious cases.

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know that there is valuable information to be gained there.

• Kunjum was killed because she was blackmailing Romesh and other important people.

A lot of Romesh Sharma's properties were in Kunjum's name anyway. So it was hard to see how she could have been blackmailing Sharma. However, others may have been blackmailed by her, either on Sharma's instructions or not.

Sources in the police are not too clear about Romesh's motive in taking Kunjum out. They are confused because Sharma's track record says something different about his modus operandi. Sharma was always very careful, in the past, about the crime he committed. Like the more intelligent criminals, he

It was his job to pick on those individuals who might have been operating in the grey zone of law and might have fallen on bad times. For obvious reasons, the police was not an avenue they could turn to for help. Sharma was the one who pointed out these men, and Dawood used his heavies to get tough with them.

Take the case of the famous M.K. Subba, whose farmhouse was allegedly grabbed by Sharma. Subba, an MP from Assam, is by his own admission one of India's richest men. In the north-east he is known as lottery king. He is believed to be a Nepali citizen who was allegedly charged with murder. All those who have tried to delve into Subba's mystery-shrouded past have had their efforts go up in smoke. A person who filed a writ petition against Subba is missing under mysterious circumstances.

This man has managed to project himself as a victim in the Sharma case. In fact, the police would have initiated an enquiry against him. Those sent to 'recapture' his men were a set of lathi-wielding men armed with hockey sticks and iron rods.

Even more disturbingly, the police are a little hesitant in pursuing any enquiries against such a powerful politician. This is one of the reasons why the police Sharma allegedly is



Romesh's farmhouse: most of his properties were in his girlfriend's name

Romesh seemed obsessed with the idea that Kunjum come to his farmhouse and perform puja. Kunjum was cleaning the idols and while she was moving around, the murderers accosted her

drew strength from the system he chose to violate.

When he grabbed Suresh Rao's helicopter, it was after he had completed all the legal formalities: which is why both the courts and the police had such a tough time nailing him on this charge. Every property Sharma grabbed was 'legally' his, he completed all the legal formalities.

For such a painstaking criminal, Kunjum's murder was an event both shoddy and amateurish (asking his own nephew to murder his girlfriend). The police say this murder lacks the Sharma imprima-tur, though it could well have been ordered by him.

By no standards does Sharma gain from this murder. If he was readying himself to get out of jail, this will set the clock back considerably.

He is now likely to be slapped with a murder charge and sent back to police custody. The court can extend his tenure in jail on the simple plea that Sharma is a dangerous individual to let loose on society — there are murders wherever he goes.

So far the police haven't really been able to collect evidence on the more serious charges. Kunjum's murder is the opportunity the police had been waiting for, to lock him up and throw away the



But if Romesh Sharma didn't have Kunjum murdered, then who did?

While it is true that his stay in jail hasn't been good for business, Romesh is still a powerful man to be reckoned with: because of all the information he has about the rich and the famous. Sharma could become inconvenient — if he became hostile. There could be some truth in rumours that there are individuals who would rather not have Romesh come out of jail. A murder charge is convenient — it will keep Sharma in till kingdom come.

For Romesh was, all said and done, no ordinary criminal. He went about conning people, grabbing property, spotting quarry for his underworld mentors to extort from. He played a vital role in the murkier sort of politics that goes on in India's underbelly. And he fed on the venal network that rules India.

His interrogation, say police, has revealed that. "We heard names of many politicians and bureaucrats came out dur-

Sharma is a metaphor for Indian politics. The Romesh Sharma case has actually nothing to do with Romesh Sharma. It is just an excuse for taking pot-shots at political enemies

ing his questioning. But what has happened after that?" asked a police officer who was present during interrogation. It is easy to believe that Operation Cover-up has already started. The most cynical among bureaucrats believe that the matter was handed over to a coordinating

committee of the home ministry with precisely this task in mind.

However, this is only one side of the story. Romesh Sharma has become a handy stick with which to beat your political — or other — adversaries. Look at the sophisticated way in which Sushma Swaraj's career was sought to be besmirched by rivals, both in her own party and outside (*see box*). Because Romesh Sharma is a metaphor for Indian politics. The Romesh Sharma case has actually nothing to do with Romesh Sharma — it is just an excuse now to take pot-shots at political enemies.

Given the political and social environment in the capital where power-brokers call the shots and your worth is judged not by who you are but by whom you know, many politicians and bureaucrats might have been seduced by Sharma's name-dropping without checking his antecedents. Unknowingly, many would have given him the legitimacy he was looking for. For many of them,

But Sharma's real strength came from corporate houses and the various criminal enterprises that used him for performing various tasks. It is the moneybags which are really prodding the investigation on. Even Kunjum's murder might have something to do with money.

Merely attending parties doesn't mean Sharma was getting help from these people. But maybe it was? Who knows?

Nikhil Kumar: The former Delhi Police commissioner was one of the first ones to stumble on Sharma's links with Dawood Ibrahim. And



Sushma Swaraj: Swore on the Gita that she had nothing to do with Sharma, that she didn't even know him. And yet, this 'charge' was used by her detractors to corner her during the Delhi Assembly elections. It would be wrong to say that Swaraj lost the election because of Sharma. But it certainly created a stink and helped her detractors.

Jitendra Prasada: More folklore
Prasada has a brother in Debal. De-

LARRY FARMER, a former FBI hapless. There is evidence, unfortunately, that he is a criminal. However, solving the crime is still

Chavira mentions that the Prime Minister is a member of the Jai Mani Dal, a Hindu party.



some level, but again we have to do with the same old thing, right?

Kunjum Budhiraja's murder has given an interesting twist to this murky case. The trajectory of police investigation will show whether the interests that created Romesh Sharma and permitted him to flourish will want to save him or not. •

SUNDAY 4—10 April 1999

Let's get physical

The face-off between the DMK and the AIADMK is turning violent in Tamil Nadu

The divide between the Dravidian parties in Tamil Nadu, the DMK and AIADMK, has always been bitter with their top leaders refusing even to acknowledge each other at public functions. And their followers down the line exchange blows at the slightest provocation. Jayalalitha, the AIADMK supremo has not even exchanged pleasantries with the DMK chief minister Karunanidhi for more than ten years. When her mentor MGR was alive, he at least maintained a nodding relationship with Karunanidhi, who in turn also used to acknowledge him. But now, even when lower-level functionaries of both the Dravidian parties meet at public functions, you can expect a spat.

And the Tamil Nadu Assembly has over the years become a bloody battlefield for the warring groups. The latest incident to hog the headlines was when the AIADMK leader in the house, R. Tamaraikani packed a powerful punch on the face of the state's agriculture minister Veerapandi Arumugham and shed blood. Tamaraikani's attack on Arumugham by all accounts became a fight between the legislature and the judiciary.

It became a legislature-judiciary stand-off in Tamil Nadu when the Speaker Palanivel Rajan ordered the arrest of Tamaraikani. The High Court immediately ordered his release but the peeved Speaker got him rearrested. But finally, on Karunanidhi's intervention, the imminent stand-off between the state Assembly and judiciary was averted with the state Assembly accepting the verdict of the High Court. Tamaraikani, flitting in and out of jail for two days, was finally released and the AIADMK made him out to be a hero in the full glare of the media. The two-judge Bench's action in suspending the Assembly resolution committing Tamaraikani to prison and its observation that the case needed to be probed in detail indicates its frame of mind. But the Speaker's categorical declaration that the Assembly had no intention of crossing swords



Tamaraikani is a known history-sheeter. At public meetings, he is famous for abusing his enemies with the choicest of four-letter words.

Even the AIADMK functionaries are scared of Tamaraikani whose secret desire is to become a minister

with the judiciary and chief minister Karunanidhi's statement that he would act as a "bridge" between the two was commendable and saved the situation from becoming more acrimonious.

Of late, the Tamil Nadu Assembly has witnessed ugly scenes. Some years back, a member who lifted his *dhoti* was rewarded later — when the party came to power — with a ministerial post. Another honourable member, who had held aloft his shoe and shouted that he would slap the Speaker, is a minister today. The Tamaraikani incident pales in comparison to what happened to Jayalalitha on 25 March, 1989. She was hit on the head by the then ruling DMK MLAs and her sari was torn. Jayalalitha then swore that she would enter the portals of the state Assembly again only as the chief minister which she did a year later.

But by all accounts, Tamaraikani is a history-sheeter and makes the most of provocative remarks followed by viol-

ent outbursts. Even way back in 1991, as an Independent member, he had slapped another MLA, Panruti Ramachandran, in the Assembly. Two years later, he made a brutal attack on a Congress member and left marks on his face and neck. His behaviour has been the same even outside the Assembly. He once assaulted an MLA during a district council meeting in the presence of the collector and police. At public meetings, he is famous for abusing his enemies with the choicest four-letter words. Even the AIADMK party functionaries are scared of Tamaraiyani, whose secret desire is to become a minister. And it is definitely not the last that you have heard of Tamaraiyani and others of his ilk who believe more in muscle power than in democracy.



Jayalalitha: strong-arm measures

Meanwhile, the other action-packed drama took place at Jayalalitha's Poes Garden residence. In a bizarre incident, Jayalalitha's auditor for many years, R. Rajasekharan claims that he was summoned to her house and brutally assaulted by high-heeled shoes and a stick by Jayalalitha, Sasikala and her nephew Mahadevan. Rajasekharan also alleged that he was made to sign two letters and a promissory note for Rs 50 lakhs by Jayalalitha and Sasikala. Jayalalitha, a picture of injured innocence, immediately issued a vehement denial and said that the whole thing was cooked up by her arch-enemy, chief minister Karunanidhi. She said that Karunanidhi had timed his act with a view to causing prejudices against her, when the case on the con-



Mahadevan : was he framed?

There was high drama when Sasikala's nephew Mahadevan was arrested by the police. Jayalalitha immediately issued a denial and pointed out that the police may torture him in jail

stitution of special court to try cases against her was pending in Supreme Court. Said a visibly angry Jayalalitha: "I am sufficiently cultured not to indulge in such acts. Mr Karunanidhi is desperate to foist cases under sections like 307 IPC, as he could not succeed in achieving his heart's desire of putting me behind bars through the special courts."

The auditor got himself admitted in a government hospital and under the full glare of the media alleged that Jayalalitha and Sasikala made him sign two letters and a promissory note for Rs 50 lakhs. How close was Rajasekharan to Jayalalitha? It is obvious there is something more to the whole incident than made out to be. Many years back when Sasikala took over the reins at Poes Garden, she threw out the then auditor of Jayalalitha from her film days. It is said that it was Sasikala who installed Rajasekharan, a Thevar like herself, into the charmed circle. But now they seem to have fallen out over his rumoured financial mishandling of various income-tax cases against Sasikala and Jayalalitha.

There was more high drama when Sasikala's nephew Mahadevan was arrested by the Tamil Nadu police which was followed by a shrill cry from Jayalalitha that the police may torture him in jail. Later, he was released on bail. Mahadevan reiterated that he was not in town on the day when Rajasekharan was allegedly beaten up. Said Mahadevan: "I have been framed. Amma (Jayalalitha) has said it already and that is the truth only." And when Mahadevan filed a case against him and asked that he be examined for any grievous injuries, the auditor mysteriously got himself discharged from the hospital. But speaking in the state Assembly, chief minister Karunanidhi said: "The law will take its course after the police completes the investigation."

The Dravidian parties in Tamil Nadu will have to bury their hatchet for otherwise there is bound to be frequent violence both in the Assembly and outside. Both sides invariably talk about law after settling scores in their inimitable styles. Imagine what will happen when the AIADMK is in power the next time around — Tamaraiyani may be rewarded with the Speaker's post. As a cynical hack puts it, "The viewing of news and political events in Tamil Nadu on television has become increasingly disturbing and more violent than watching *Shaktiman*." But in Tamil Nadu, one can expect only more political *tamashas* and brawls in the coming weeks as Jayalalitha continues to blow hot and cold with the BJP government at the Centre. •

Sreedhar Pillai / Madras

Jayalalitha in Delhi

A tale of two tea parties

She said that she was coming to Delhi to attend a seminar on inner-party democracy; to give a talk on Indo-US relations; to attend a function in honour of the Khalsa tercentenary; to have tea with some friends—a fairly innocuous if slightly incongruous schedule. And oh yes, there was that little matter of a coordination committee meeting where Jayalalitha said that she would ask for a joint parliamentary committee to probe into Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat's allegations against one of the government's allies: the defence minister George Fernandes.

Was it just a coincidence that the capital was rocked by an earthquake right in the middle of the AIADMK leader's visit?

However, by the time Jayalalitha arrived at the tea party thrown for her by the BJP MP Vijay Goel, she was charm personified. Even though the Prime Minister arrived a good 20 minutes after her, the lady did not throw a tantrum. She chatted amicably to Goel's wife Preeti about her days as an actress; politely ignored Kalpnath Rai who quickly grabbed the seat next to her the minute it was vacated and chided journalists for describing her visit as 'ominous'. "For you anything I do is ominous," she complained, somewhat unreasonably.

And in the background the music played on. The *shehnai* was soon replaced by a piano player playing the theme from *Love Story* (and quite rightly too: for isn't love never having to say you're sorry?) And still, Atal Behari Vajpayee did not arrive. But for once, Jayalalitha did not let that bother her. She had just attended the coordination committee meeting where she had done exactly as

she had threatened she would do: ask for a JPC to look into Bhagwat's allegations and demanded the defence minister's resignation. Small wonder then, having to wait for the Prime Minister of India did not goad her into reaching out for her high heels. Having had her say, she was in a good mood.

In fact, she even went as far as to express unanimity with the government's decision not to set up a JPC on the Bhagwat issue. "I am part of the government and whatever decision the government takes, I am bound by it," she said self-righteously. (Then what was her problem with M.K. Bezbaryuh's transfer? With the Cauvery Accord? With L.K. Advani's decision not to dismiss the DMK government in Tamil Nadu?). No one asked; but sundry BJP MPs gathered there heaved a sigh of relief. The government was safe—for now.

And when Vajpayee arrived, he found Jayalalitha playing her new-found role of a helpful ally to the hilt. When the reluctant Prime Minister was pestered by reporters to answer questions—and to speak loudly and clearly—it was Jayalalitha who came to his rescue. "This is a social occasion, he is not here to answer questions," she beseeched reporters. Adding, "why don't you let him relax."

Vajpayee gave her a startled look, but wisely did not voice the thought which must have crossed his mind. After all, if Jayalalitha could play the diplomat, so could he.

Later, the two were presented a painting each by their host. When Vajpayee looked at the one given to Jayalalitha, he confessed that he liked hers better. "*Aap dono aapas me decide kar lena* (you deci-



ded this between yourselves)," muttered a sheepish Goel. Jayalalitha just smiled and sipped her coconut water, ordered specially by her hosts from Taj Mahal Hotel.

In fact, both the decor and the menu was planned keeping the chief guest in mind. The food ranged from south Indian to *chaat* from Chandni Chowk (Goel's constituency). And Jayalalitha made it a point to taste both the *dosas* and *dahi-bhallas* though she confessed the *chutney* in the *bhallas* was too sweet for someone with diabetes. The conversation then turned to cooking. "Do you cook?" asked Goel. Jayalalitha said no, she wasn't a very good cook. "But our Prime Minister can cook very well," said Goel triumphantly. Vajpayee laughed and said that he had been cooking since his student days when he lived in a hostel and later as a *pracharak* when he had to fend for himself.

Clearly this was purely a social occasion. And none of Vajpayee's former ambassadors to Jayalalitha was present: Jaswant Singh, George Fernandes and Pramod Mahajan were all conspicuous



by their absence. Mahajan was not just content to stay away from the tea party, he made it a point to leave town, citing a prior engagement in Pune as his excuse.

And if Sonia Gandhi was miffed at Jayalalitha's refusal to join her in demanding a JPC into Bhagwat's allegations, she should take heart from Jayalalitha's speech at Vigyan Bhavan. Speaking at a seminar on inner-party democracy, she chose to ignore the BJP's role in tabling the Women's Reservation Bill. Instead, she singled out the Congress for praise, saying that she was thankful that 'the Indian National Congress, the oldest party in the world', had followed her example (in implementing the 33 per cent quota for women within the party).

As Madam spoke on stage, all 18 of her AIADMK MPs were busy distributing press kits off-stage claiming how the party had implemented the quota within the party. (In fact, wherever Madam went, all 18 followed. An astonished Goel was proudly informed by one such lungi-clad member, "All 18 of us are

At BJP MP Vijay Goel's tea party, Jayalalitha was charm personified. Though Vajpayee arrived a good 20 minutes after her, the lady did not throw a tantrum. She chatted amicably about her days as an actress and chided journalists for describing her visit as 'ominous'

here!")

Addressing the group at Vigyan Bhavan, Jayalalitha then quoted a Chinese proverb saying that women hold up half the sky. To which Vajpayee replied that if women hold up half the sky, they must be made to hold at least one-third of the political ground; and went on to talk of his party's commitment to the cause.

Clearly, he had noticed that while both he and I.K. Gujral (the third speaker at the seminar) were presented a bouquet of white gladioli each, Jayalalitha had been given a bouquet of 33 red roses!

Vajpayee, however, was keen to keep Jayalalitha in good humour. He pointed

out that the party was so committed to implementing women's reservation that two of his allies were women. He called them 'leaders of exceptional mass appeal' and then with a twinkle in his eye said, "And as you can see, they are both playing an important role in national politics today." As the audience roared with laughter, even Jayalalitha had to smile at this gentle chiding of her and Mamata Banerjee's brand of politics.

The visit ended with tea at Ashoka Hotel hosted by her friend Subramanian Swamy (friendship dated: 1998 Lok Sabha polls). The only BJP representative at the gathering was Uma Bharti. (Considering that Swamy had announced that he would only be calling non-BJP members, one wonders what that made Bharti? Specially since she spent the better time of her visit chatting up a fellow MP from Madhya Pradesh, Kamal Nath.)

However, the Congress turned out in full strength, with Sonia Gandhi reiterating that the meeting was a continuation of the friendship between the two (What friendship? Wasn't it Jayalalitha herself who denounced Sonia as a 'foreigner' during her last visit to Delhi?) And it was Nath (who else?) who walked up to Jayalalitha and asked her if she felt the tremors of the earthquake the night before. "Yes, of course," replied Jayalalitha quite naively. "My room was on the

tenth floor." However, she soon realised that Nath was referring to her visit and spent the rest of the evening talking about 'political earthquakes'.

Finally, the visit was over. And Jayalalitha left, leaving everyone wondering what the fuss was all about. For as far as BJP strategists could figure out, at the end of her stay her only unresolved problem was an out-of-order lift at the Ashoka Hotel.

Surely that can't be provocation enough to pull down the government. Then again, with Jayalalitha, you never can tell. •

Priya Sahgal/New Delhi

COLOUR OF MONEY

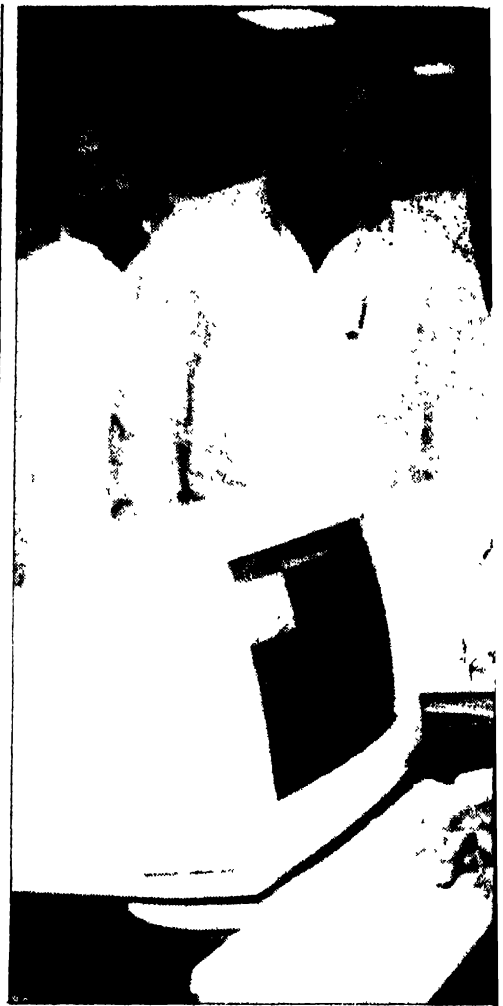
Hyderabad's fake currency controversy turns political

When the rumour turned to fact, panic spread like wildfire. The press had speculated and the police later confirmed that they had busted a gang of forgers who were making fake 500-rupee notes. The value of the fake notes could be anywhere between Rs 60 lakhs to a crore — that is, between 12,000 to 20,000 forged notes were circulating in the market.

Suddenly, petrol pumps, stores, book- ing clerks at railway reservation centres, RTC bus stands, theatres, even maids and milkmen refused to take 500-rupee notes. Banks faced protests when they tried to give out the denomination to people withdrawing money. Employees wanted their cash salaries in 100-rupee notes. The fear was not only of landing

up with a fake note that could not be used later, but of being caught with one. The state CID investigating the case had made it clear that anyone caught with forged notes would be deemed guilty unless they could prove they had no connection with the gang. It is in ones and twos that forged notes are palmed off innocuously to unsuspecting people. The onus of proving innocence would therefore have to lie with the man giving out a forged note.

When the Nizamabad district police picked up a man on the suspicion of passing off forged notes, they didn't realise the repercussions it would have. Initial investigations led to the house of a man called Vittal. And that was the breakthrough the police had been looking for.



Know your notes

How to separate the real Rs 500 from the fake

Although the initial panic has died down, forged Rs 500 notes that have already been circulated — worth anywhere between Rs 60 lakhs and crores — are still out there in the market. According to forgers, their main distribution centres were in the districts of Andhra Pradesh, and in Bangalore, Madras, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Bombay.

But by now, the notes have circulated multiple times, especially in places outside Andhra where the panic did not spread and people were simply exchanging worthless paper for much more worthless than RBI money is, of course, a matter of degree — and a different story, according to CID

sleuths investigating the case, here are a few benchmarks for testing these forged Rs 500 notes.

- Counterfeit Rs 500 notes will be less bright than the original ones. This is because the forgers could not get the right paper and had to do with a duller quality.
- The watermark of Mahatma Gandhi's head may not be centred properly (next to the figure 500) and is printed a little on the side on some notes.
- The security thread has been replaced by a silver line. The forgers could not come up with a method for

putting in the thread. Even the words 'RBI' written in Hindi and English are missing on that line. (But this might be extremely difficult to make out with naked eye.)

- If a counterfeit Rs 500 note is dipped in water, its colours will fade. Unlike the original, the forged notes were printed very simply on a laser jet printer. Though this is probably the surest method of detecting the forgery, it is also the most drastic.
- The two sides of the counterfeit notes were printed on two different papers and then glued together. A little rub at one end would separate the two papers in a counterfeit note.

An important pointer: These methods apply for detecting the notes of forged Rs 500 notes.

Forgery made easy

How to use the money machine

Viewers to find the story, plug the fake certificates, and get funds. Thankfully, however, the TDP public was brief. The forged certificates had not been sold into general circulation and were restricted to a circle of banks and four or five money lenders. When they were found out, they resorted to making a substantial Rs 25 lakh — Rs 5 lakh from Punjab National Bank, Rs 6.5 lakh from Tel



Desktop computers and scanners: the enabling factors

Mutual Benefit Fund and the rest from four or five big moneylenders.

Naidu has probably got the message by now. While ushering in an IT era, one of the first things to do is create defences against computer crimes. •

The business flourished and at the time of their arrest they could print 60 notes a day and had a network of at least 20 agents and sub-agents, many of them belonging to adjoining states (see box).

In fact, the network was set to expand further. They had ordered new machinery from Singapore and were planning to buy just the right paper from Switzerland to overcome the few differences that still showed on the forgeries if put to closer scrutiny (see box).

But crime always seems to end up meeting politics. And when that

happens what would otherwise have been considered good work by the police ends up by the way side. The investigation was going just fine till the police ran into Ramakrishna Goud—a small-time TDP activist. That he is involved in the whole affair seems almost beyond doubt. But the extent of his involvement is still not clear.

Ramakrishna Goud's name came up a couple of days after the forgery story broke. Everyone knew he was a TDP activist and matters would have ended there if he had been arrested along with

the rest. Instead, Goud disappeared. Days later, when he surrendered to the police, his explanation was: "I have nothing to do with this. But as soon as my name figured in the racket on 3 March, I left for Trivandrum on the advice of my advocates. However, when my political mentors' names were unnecessarily dragged into the subject, I decided to surrender."

By that time, however, the criminal case had turned into a political campaign. First, the Congress pasted pictures of chief minister Chandrababu Naidu posing with Goud all over town. TDP functionaries pulled them down next morning and waved Congress MP Baga Reddy's pictures with Goud the next day in Assembly. Everyone was rushing to check their photo albums. Who was Goud seen with? Who attended Goud's party? Whose party did Goud go to?

Even that might have ended after a little brouhaha if Goud had stayed arrested. Instead, Goud got himself admitted in hospital on grounds that he was ill and the next day, he and the police constable who was supposed to be guarding him, disappeared for two hours. There was panic at the hospital. But Goud returned two hours later, claiming he had gone out to dinner. But the constable was completely sozzled and now the police refuses to comment on the matter. An enraged Naidu ordered the suspension of the district sub-jailer, the police constable and the doctor at Nizamabad government hospital under whose supervision Goud had been kept in the hospital. Needless to say, the doctor's suspension invited protests from other doctors at the hospital. So an enquiry has been ordered.

That is, as expected, where the matter rests. The Opposition soon turned its attention to other things and the issue died down when the state government, with the help of the Reserve Bank of India, put up an ultraviolet scanning machine in Hyderabad to test forged notes.

That is not, however, where the matter ends. Those forgeries are still out in the market and are by now all over the country. Though the police now claims there are only 5,000 forged notes — worth about Rs 25 lakh — no one believes them. But if the government is willing to go easy on the issue, so are the people. The attitude is: "It's paper money after all." •

Sarita Rani/Hyderabad

Seeking legitimacy

Sonia Gandhi wants to complete party elections on schedule



Congress president Sonia Gandhi has overruled the suggestion by some PCC chiefs not to hold organisational elections in the states where Assembly elections are due in November. It will not only upset the apple-cart of the sitting state leaders, but will also annoy those PCC chiefs who are scared of facing the party polls.

Powerful state leaders like Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy, Dharam Singh, Pratap Rao Bhonsle and Hemananda Biswal were not in favour of holding organisational elections as they think that it will have adverse effects on the party's prospects in the Assembly polls. All PCC chiefs of the states where the Congress is in Opposition and likely to win are keen to retain their positions as according to convention they will become chief ministers.

Sonia has taken the bull by the horns by upsetting the calculations of these state leaders. I think she is in a hurry to hold party polls to give legitimacy to her leadership. She knows that she had been elected party president only by the members of the working committee and outgoing president Sitaram Kesri along with his Man Friday Tariq Anwar had openly opposed the move. She also knows that though this decision was endorsed by the AICC, all these AICC members had been elected during Kesri's time.

Keeping these facts in mind, she might be thinking of forming a new AICC along with PCCs where her leadership will not only be unquestionable, but also fully legitimate. Apparently, Sonia also feels that unless her new formula of making vote-banks on the basis of social equations is not implemented, Congress cannot be restored to the status it had during Indira Gandhi's time.

She is desperate to get back the winning combination of Brahmins, Harijans and Muslims along with a major chunk

of women voters. She must be confident that being a woman and Indira's daughter-in-law, she would be able to attract women voters cutting across party lines.

Sonia has decided to go ahead with organisational polls and wants the entire exercise to be over by 18 August. Before taking this decision, she had long discus-

The election authority headed by Mirdha comprises senior leaders like Kamaluddin Ahmed, A.K. Antony and K.N. Joshi. The authority has already initiated the exercise. A membership drive has been launched which will be over by April. District and block committees will be formed by June while the PCCs and the AICC will be elected in July.

Sonia is keen on giving due representation to women, minorities, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the state units through organisational elections



Sonia Gandhi: following her mother-in-law

sions with the members of the AICC election authority and its chairman Ram Niwas Mirdha. It was felt that the state units would have enough time to gear up for Assembly elections after the organisational polls.

She is keen to finish her agenda of giving due representation to women, minorities, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The present state units have not been constituted as per the new criteria of representation and she wants it to be done through organisational elections.

The election of the Congress president will take place in mid-August, ending the process of organisational elections.

The high command is yet to appoint new PCC chiefs in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. While Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot continues to be the president of the state unit, the present incumbent in Madhya Pradesh is likely to be replaced by an OBC or a Brahmin.

Meanwhile, Gehlot has started exercising his authority as the PCC chief and nominated 21 office-bearers. All of them are women. •

PAWAR-CUT

Sonia makes her displeasure known

For one year, Sonia Gandhi has bided her time. All her friends have told her that Sharad Pawar must be cut down to size. But Sonia has had the sense to recognise that masterly inaction — or at the very least, malign neglect — is the best way to handle the portly Maratha.

The strategy has worked brilliantly. Pawar is still Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha. But everybody in the Congress knows that he does not count for anything. So the crowds that still throng his sprawling residence at Gurudwara Rakabganj Road consist of non-entities and out-of-towners who still believe that Pawar has any clout.

Even his MPs have deserted him. In the aftermath of last year's election, Pawar had grandiosely taken credit for the Congress' performance in Maharashtra. Even then, this was an exaggeration. Many of the newly-elected MPs from Maharashtra actually hated Pawar and belonged to rival factions. But those that did owe allegiance to him have now made alternative arrangements.

A few loyalists remain. Gurudas Kamath has stuck with Pawar through thick and thin. Praful Patel has made new friends within the Sonia camp but has still not deserted his former mentor. Najma Heptullah keeps up with Sharad but their friendship is less visible than it used to be.

But generally, most people have got the message: if you stay friends with Pawar, the invitations to 10 Janpath will dry up.

IF THE MALICIOUS neglect has worked so well, why then has Sonia Gandhi suddenly decided to make her displeasure known? As is true of most things that have to do with Sonia, nobody really knows. But the general view is that she believes Pawar actively subverted the Congress' assault on the Vajpayee government on the floor of the Lok Sabha.

At the root of the problem is the Bhagwat affair. Before Admiral Bhagwat was sacked, several Opposition leaders were called in by the Prime Minister and the defence minister and given the government's version. Pawar, who knows Bhagwat well and who made him Deputy Chief of Naval Staff against the advice of civil servants and former chiefs, said "don't do anything drastic. Let me talk to him first". A few days later he phoned George Fernandes and said that he had failed. "Go ahead and do what you want," he advised.

The government knows that it can embarrass Pawar if he now makes a fuss over the Bhagwat sacking. It believes that it can point to Pawar's role in promoting Bhagwat and can also reveal that he failed to knock sense into Bhagwat before the sacking.

All this makes it awkward for Pawar to carry out Sonia's bidding: launch an all-out attack on the government on the Bhagwat issue.

Last week, the Congress was swept by rumours to the effect that Pawar was about to be sacked as Leader of the Opposition. These were always hard to believe the sudden sack is not part of Sonia's style. But of one thing there is no doubt: he won't last long in the job unless he does something dramatic to win Sonia over to his side

And that is why 10 Janpath has suddenly turned openly hostile.

OF COURSE, PAWAR is not short of detractors within the Congress. They say that he has a friendship with George Fernandes which he places before the Congress' interests. There are also the usual scurrilous suggestions: defence deals, corruption, etc. Moreover, some Congressmen believe that Pawar is preparing the ground for floating a regional party and linking up with the BJP in Maharashtra. One particularly involved conspiracy theory has it that Pawar and Mulayam Singh Yadav are friends (this is true) and that they have some joint involvement in defence deals which they would like to keep under wraps (this is completely unsubstantiated and unlikely).

The point about these stories is not whether they are true or false. The point is that Congressman after Congressman rushes into the study at 10 Janpath and repeats them to Sonia on a daily basis. Given that she already has a bias against Pawar and given that he has been so notoriously reluctant to go for the government on the Bhagwat issue, Sonia is receptive to suggestions that Pawar has some ulterior motive.

Last week, the Congress was swept by rumours to the effect that Pawar was about to be sacked as Leader of the Opposition. These were always hard to believe — the sudden sack is not part of Sonia's style. But of one thing there is no doubt: he won't last long in the job unless he does something dramatic to win Sonia over to his side.

But, what *can* he do? He has already tried everything without making any dent in Sonia's hostility towards him. So, things look bleak for Pawar. Oh yes, he will remain one of the party's senior leaders. But then that is a category that includes N.D. Tiwari and Jitendra Prasad as well.

It is a long way from the prime ministership which Pawar nearly won eight years ago. •





IBM's latest notebook computer series is targeted at the mum with a pram. But will she buy it?

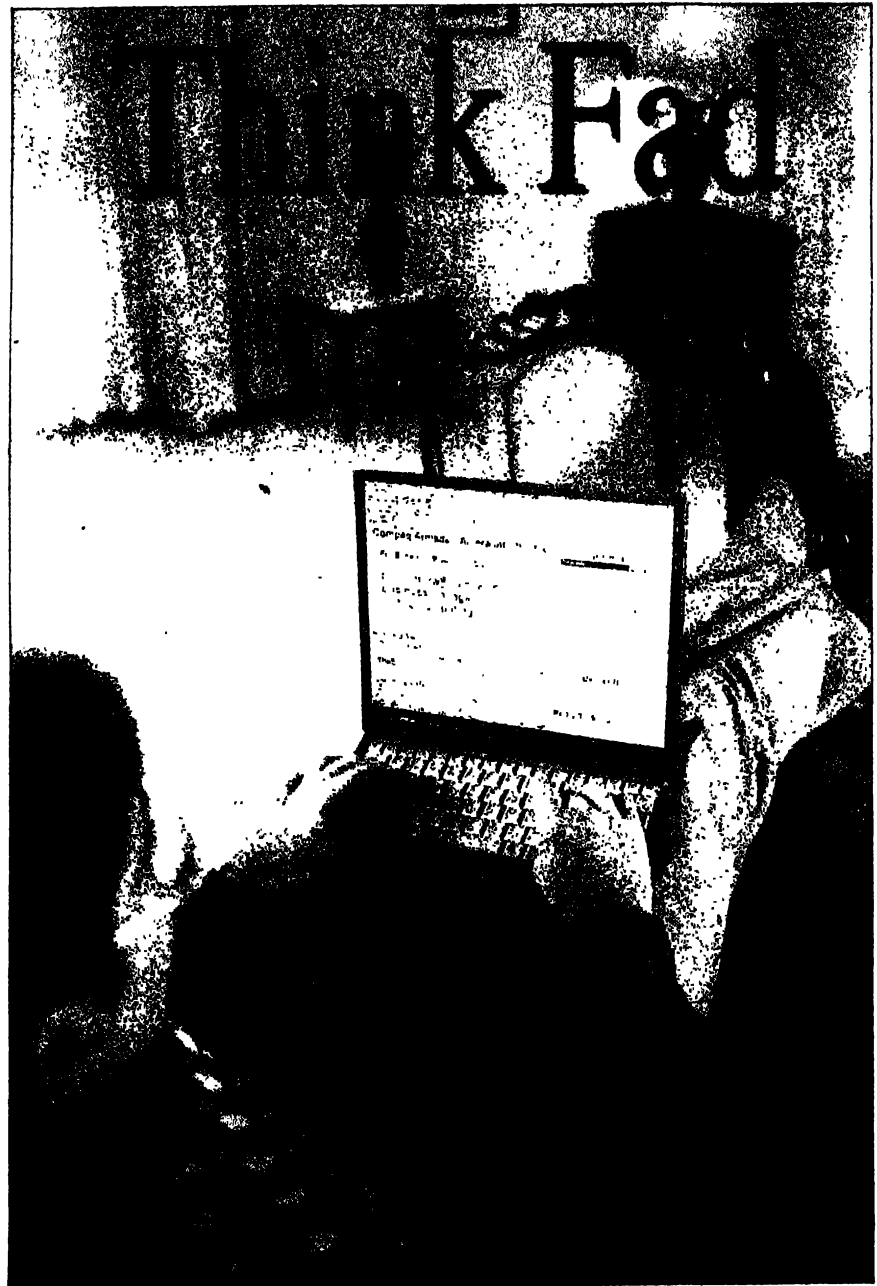
What do Sunny Deol, Chandrababu Naidu and Anil Kumble have in common? (Hint: It cannot be their good looks).

If you still haven't got it, check their travelling kits — it's an IBM ThinkPad!

IBM has recently launched its latest i-series of ThinkPad notebook computers in India and hopes popular figures like Kumble and Naidu will do for its image what ten marketing teams would struggle to achieve: putting the ThinkPad firmly onto the 'lifestyle products' bandwagon.

"This was part of IBM's worldwide strategy — to position notebooks as lifestyle products cutting across the regular customer profile," explains K.S. Narahari, IBM's deputy GM for Corporate Communications. "The idea is to sell it as a product meant not only for top line executives but to any upwardly mobile person who can afford it."

So IBM's creative team along with advertisers O&M came up with their idea of an upwardly mobile person. One poster has a balding man in his 30s, boasting about his new clothes, girlfriend and his 'ideas on economic recovery'. The ThinkPad figures promi-



nently in his economic recovery package for India. Another poster shows a young mother with her baby in a pram. The baby believes her mother is a 'goddess' because she feeds her, cleans her, works two jobs, surfs the Net — and what else? — has a ThinkPad.

Says Neeraj Sharma, product manager for ThinkPad, "The ThinkPad ad-campaign is more attitudinal, more emotive and more personalised."

Pretty much in the Lalitaji fashion, the ad is getting talked about more than the product. And for an IT product that's not necessarily good news. In fact, it can be very bad news.

For one, people don't buy computers in India the way they buy deodorants, or even cars. The starting price of a ThinkPad would be close to Rs 1.3 lakh. And unlike a car, you can't be seen driving around in it. If you want to make an impression — which is what the ad is all about — you have to be seen lugging it around with the sticker facing out. But a mother carrying her baby, the pram and a ThinkPad in the park would look more awkward than hip.

The campaign may have good entertainment value, but the question is, will it boost the bottomlines?

Unlikely. IBM's premise seems to be that what works in the US should also work here. It's a premise that's burnt the pockets of a lot of MNCs.

There are two main reasons for this: a notebook is not a utility product in India as yet. And it certainly isn't easily affordable.

To begin with, India still has a lot of catching up to do in the desktop PC market. Even for those willing to invest in a computer, the notebook is not a priority. A desktop starts at Rs 30,000. A notebook at Rs 90,000. A ThinkPad at Rs 1.2 lakh. Why would any normal Indian customer — notorious for price consciousness — pay more than three times the money for something that can be done on an ordinary PC?

"Brand is a big pull — a ThinkPad is a complete machine for a complete day," says IBM's Narahari who likes using ad lingo. "Besides, this (the notebook) is like your watch. The brand of your wall clock (meaning the desktop) matters very little. However, your wristwatch is something you make sure is the right brand, the right make."

Probably true. But it's only after something becomes a utility product — you *have* to wear a shirt, or a watch — that customers begin to look at brands. A notebook computer is a utility product in the US. Here it is an indulgence. Specially for mothers with prams and babies.

Equally importantly, apart from mobile professionals like lawyers and doctors, the major market segment in the US is the student community. Few Indian parents are likely to give their children over Rs 1 lakh to buy a ThinkPad when they can do with a notebook worth Rs 3. The crucial student segment is completely non-existent in India and is likely to remain so for some time.

IBM is missing out on a very basic fact. It says it is targeting the ThinkPad at the Rs 12 lakh-income-a-year group. In the US a notebook costs about US \$1600 to US \$92000. At an average income of US \$6000 per month, it is still 1/3 of the salary. For upper-middle class India (which probably does Rs 1 lakh a month) a ThinkPad would still be a month's salary or more.

Besides, all MNCs have to deal with the peculiar Indian way of finding cheaper way to do things. For instance, Ruchi, a college student, exchanges e-mail with her boyfriend over 10 times a day using a pager with an e-mail service. "When I need to send mail all I have to do is just make a call from wherever I

can find a phone, read out my message to the pager company which forwards it to my boyfriend in the US. He does the same thing," she says. This saves her from the prying eyes of her father, gives her a kick whenever her pager beeps in front of her friends *and* she only has to pay Rs 250 a month for the service. Now how do you deal with that?

It's a fact other IT companies have been aware of. "All over the world notebooks are seen as a productivity device used by professionals and students. In India, the fact of the matter is that more than 90 per cent of such sys-

is getting into the wrong segment. Why would anybody who needs a computer for general use spend so much to buy a notebook?" asks Pravir Arora, business manager (for Armada Notebooks) at Compaq.

Wipro's Balachander is more frank: "What's worse is that this kind of marketing is only taking the product away from its core utility value. To make it an aspirational product is not desirable in terms of expanding the market."

The need for mobile computing has been felt very keenly by Indian professionals in the last few years and those who can break the price barrier have



NEERAJ SHARMA,
product manager,
ThinkPad

"The customer profile has shifted from just IT professionals and CEO-level executives to a more generalised one"

tems are still sold in the corporate sector because it is an expensive proposition. At best, these are suited for the SOHO (Small Office, Home Office) user," says V. Balachander, product manager (Notebooks) at Wipro Acers.

Sales figure confirm that. While notebook penetration in India is a mere 2.5 per cent of all computer sales, the Asia Pacific average is 13 per cent and the World average 17 per cent. Apart from price, "the other main reason for this is because benefits of mobile computing systems are not yet understood properly," says Balachander.

Compaq, which sells the largest number of notebooks in India, also believes the mobile computer market in India is not mature enough. The price barrier is still high. "What worries me is that IBM

broken it with alacrity. IBM's product manager (Notebooks) Neeraj Sharma is right when he says, "The customer profile has shifted from just IT professionals and CEO-level executives to a more generalised one: doctors, lawyers, chartered accountants, sales managers out in the field."

But Neeraj is way out when he says, "These could also include mothers and children using it for surfing the Net, playing games (in the park?) or sending e-mail." A notebook computer is *not* an entertainment product in India. And till it gets much much cheaper, it cannot be sold like a credit card — *Visa Power, Just Do It*. Not yet, anyway.

Postscript: As a matter of passing interest, if Kumble uses the ThinkPad, what does Sachin Tendulkar Use? •

Anuja Joshi/Bangalore

SHE'S COME A LONG WAY

For someone who became an actress by accident, directing as versatile an actor as Naseeruddin Shah must be the acme of success. Ten years back, Mahabanoo Mody-Kotwal's son, scriptwriter/director Kaizad Navroze Kotwal, had come home from America looking for someone to do the sixth character in a play he was putting up. Mahabanoo filled in. She has since acted in films like *Sixth Happiness*, *Such A Long Journey* and the Merchant-Ivory production, *Cotton Mary*, and directed an all-male cast in the Yasmina Reza play, *Art*. In Calcutta



PRADIP SANYAL

Mahabanoo with Naseeruddin Shah: stellar performance

recently, she hit it off with the audience directing Shah in *(W)hole In The Head*, a series of dramatic monologues on the

millennium experience in which she also acted. On being asked how she held the audience rapt for close to an hour all on her own,

she quipped: "You've got to slog it out during rehearsals and be more confident than usual on stage."



REINER SHARMA

Iyengar: turning yoga into an art

DON'T DESPAIR, AIDS HAS A CURE

Good news for the HIV-afflicted: there is, apparently, an yogic anodyne for AIDS. B.K.S. Iyengar, who started practising this ancient form of mind-body exercise way back in 1936, says that his brand of yoga covers everything from common cold to this modern-day scourge. The tough-looking,

media-savvy guru — "Yoga was an organic exercise; I made it into an art" — who has about 200 yoga centres named after him around the world, also claims that a few hospitals even practise his line of treatment for cardiac illnesses. About another 20th-century obsession, diet, he doesn't have any specific advice. "I lived on tap water for days, so how can I talk about diet," he says. "What is important is the assimilation of whatever you eat." He should be knowing: at his age most of us would be doddering old men.

THE SON THINKS TWICE BEFORE RISING

He knows when to say no. When 31-year-old Rajiv Bajaj was selected by the World Economic Forum as one of the Top 100 Global Leaders of Tomorrow, his first reaction was surprise; then a quick refusal. Rajiv, son of auto giant Rahul Bajaj, explained that he had declined the honour because he didn't



Bajaj: prudent decision

think his 'present preoccupations' (he's a vice-president in dad's company, Bajaj Auto) would permit him to justify WEF's confidence in him. With the father set to be the next CII president, it's good to see at least one member of the family thinking twice before accepting positions. As Rajiv said, he needs to prove himself before he collects any medals. Save that thought!

INDIAN COUTURIERS, HAIL!



Gwyneth Paltrow and Judi Dench with their Oscars



Shekhar Kapur with his wife



Jani and Khoia

Poor Shekhar Kapur, somebody must've put a hex on him! After all that hyper billing, his *Elizabeth* ended up with only one Oscar, that too for make-up. *Shakespeare in Love* won seven, including best actress for Gwyneth Paltrow, and Steven Spielberg walked away with the best director award for *Saving Private Ryan*. It was Indian tragedy at LA's night of dazzle, though part salvation came from unexpected quarters. At the Academy awards in Los Angeles, Dame Judi Dench, best supporting actress for her cameo as Queen Elizabeth I, wore an outfit designed by Bombay fashion merchants Sandeep Khoia and Abu Jani: a hand-embroidered cream, gold and silver thread coat that had fashion editors hailing it for simplicity and elegance. Sources in the British film industry say that the designer duo was most probably recommended to Dench by Kapur.

ADDING SPICE TO HIS LIFE

Forget the Aston Villa incident; that's a closed chapter. Goal-hungry Indian striker Bhaichung Bhutia now insists that making spices is just as much fun. The 19-year-old, Indian



Bhutia: life isn't all play


football's only pin-up boy, has launched a company, High Altitude Spices, in partnership with his brother-in-law.

Based in Ravangla, a town next to his village Tien-Ki-Kam in Sikkim, the company will not only be making spices — next in line would be fruit juices, while the first spicy product to roll off the factory shelves will be 'gingerina'.



Living in Death Shadow


Uranium mining in Jaduguda, Bihar, is causing radiation, genetic mutation and slow death. And there is no protection for the villagers, nowhere to go



Eight-year-old Neelu (from Tilaitand, half-a-km away from the present tailing pond) suffers from a serious blood disorder. Unable to stand on his feet, he walks on all fours. His father is a Class-IV employee at UCIL.

Ranjit Lohar is a UCIL miner. His three-year-old son suffers from a blood disorder and needs blood transfusion at regular intervals. Ranjit himself has a bone disorder: one vertebra of his spine was never formed. He sometimes feels an acute pain in his joints and cannot work.

In 1997, the wife of a UCIL miner, living inside the UCIL colony of Jaduguda, gave birth to a disabled child with severe skeletal distortions. Though this child is still alive, his father is reluctant to talk to the media



1 Seven-year-old Gandhar was born with one eye. He cannot sit or stand on his legs. He cannot speak either. His village, Mechua, is less than one km from the UCIL tailing pond

2 Tailings landing in the open tailing pond. The UCIL has constructed these unshielded and unfenced tailing ponds in gross violation of international safety norms

Such stories abound in the Adivasi villages close to UCIL's sprawling complex in Jaduguda, south Bihar. For years, the local people took such abnormalities for granted. It was God's will, they told themselves. But of late, they have begun wondering whether the mines, the factory, and a pond — where effluents from the plant flow freely — are responsible for their woes.

The UCIL plant in Jaduguda, hemmed in by a ring of mountains resembling a horse-shoe, is the sole supplier of uranium for India's nuclear power stations. And, lately, the installation has come under the spotlight, as it is being charged with causing radiation pollution in the region. Today, local inhabitants tend to believe that all the ailments, deformities and debilitation that they've suffered for decades have been caused by radioactive wastes which UCIL releases into a 100-acre 'tailing' pond.

The Jharkhand Organisation Against Radiation (JOAR) claims that about 30,000 people living in 15 villages are exposed to radiation. JOAR has close to 3,000



Today, the villagers are more inclined to believe than the decades have been caused by radioactive wastes which

5



3 Born in Mechua, Sumi Soren is now married and has moved to a village 12 km away. She has two children. Both of them are blind

4 Since the UCIL authorities have not fenced off the tailing ponds, people from nearby villages and their cattle have easy access to the pondbeds. Most of these illiterate tribal villagers, including children, have no knowledge of the risk of radiation in the vicinity

5 Tulsi Kui from Chatikucha village is a sweeper at UCIL. When she got chest cancer, UCIL sent her to Jamshedpur for treatment. Presently, Tulsi is not fully cured and out of a job. In the last five years, at least 21 women in the area have contracted the disease, and some of them have already died

...ever before that all the ailments they have suffered down
UCIL releases into a 100-acre 'tailing' pond



members and a strong network links the *pradhans* of the affected villages.

The existing 'tailing' pond lies just 40 metres away from the village of Dungardihi. 'Tailings' are liquid and solid wastes that emerge after uranium ore are processed to produce 'yellow cake' — an ingredient that goes to fuel nuclear power plants. And the tailing pond is a place, specially designed and constructed, to hold that effluent.

According to a JOAR survey done in seven villages within a 1-km radial area of the pond, 47 per cent of the women have reported disrupted menstrual cycle, and 18 per cent said they suffered either miscarriages or gave birth to stillborn babies in the last five years. Moreover, nearly all women complained of fatigue, weakness and depression.

The survey reveals that people in the nearby villages suffer from ailments such as skin diseases, cancer, tuberculosis, fertility loss, bone and brain damage, kidney damage, hypertension, disorder of the central nervous system, congenital deformities, insomnia, nausea,

dizziness, pain in the joints and abdomen, etc.

JOAR president Ghanasyam Biruli says that the incidence of these diseases in the area is far too high to be easily explained away. He suspects that the waste materials released into the pond remain radioactive and are posing a hazard to human and animal health.

Biruli says they became aware of the problem in the early Nineties and decided to do the survey. He claims that nearly a third of the women are having fertility problems, while 70 per cent of the people are suffering from TB.

And the problems are not confined to humans alone. Buffaloes in the area are showing a deformity in their tails and kendu fruits are turning out to be seedless.

The UCIL authorities, however, deny any radiation above permissible levels. In a faxed response to SUNDAY's questionnaire, UCIL chairman and managing director J.L. Bhasin claimed that "the radiation level in the villages around the fenced area of the tailing pond is of the order of the local natural background. Radiation exposure to the villagers is within the prescribed limits."

A health unit under the Bhaba Atomic Research Centre (BARC) is there at UCIL to monitor the workplace and



Veterans in the villages concede that the mines and the lot feels that the industry has only brought them debilit



6 The Bhatin unit of UCIL mines has this open ventilator where, during summer, villagers throng for the cool air. This air comes from the uranium mines and carries uranium dust. But the ventilator is neither fenced off nor guarded by the UCIL security



7 Liquid tailings flood the road, and villagers and cattle are forced to wade through it

8 Bhanja Tudu, a contract labourer at the tailing pond, just two days before he died. As a child, he used to play in the tailing pond, collecting stone chips from heaps of dry tailings, until a festering wound appeared on his neck and forced him to be bed-ridden

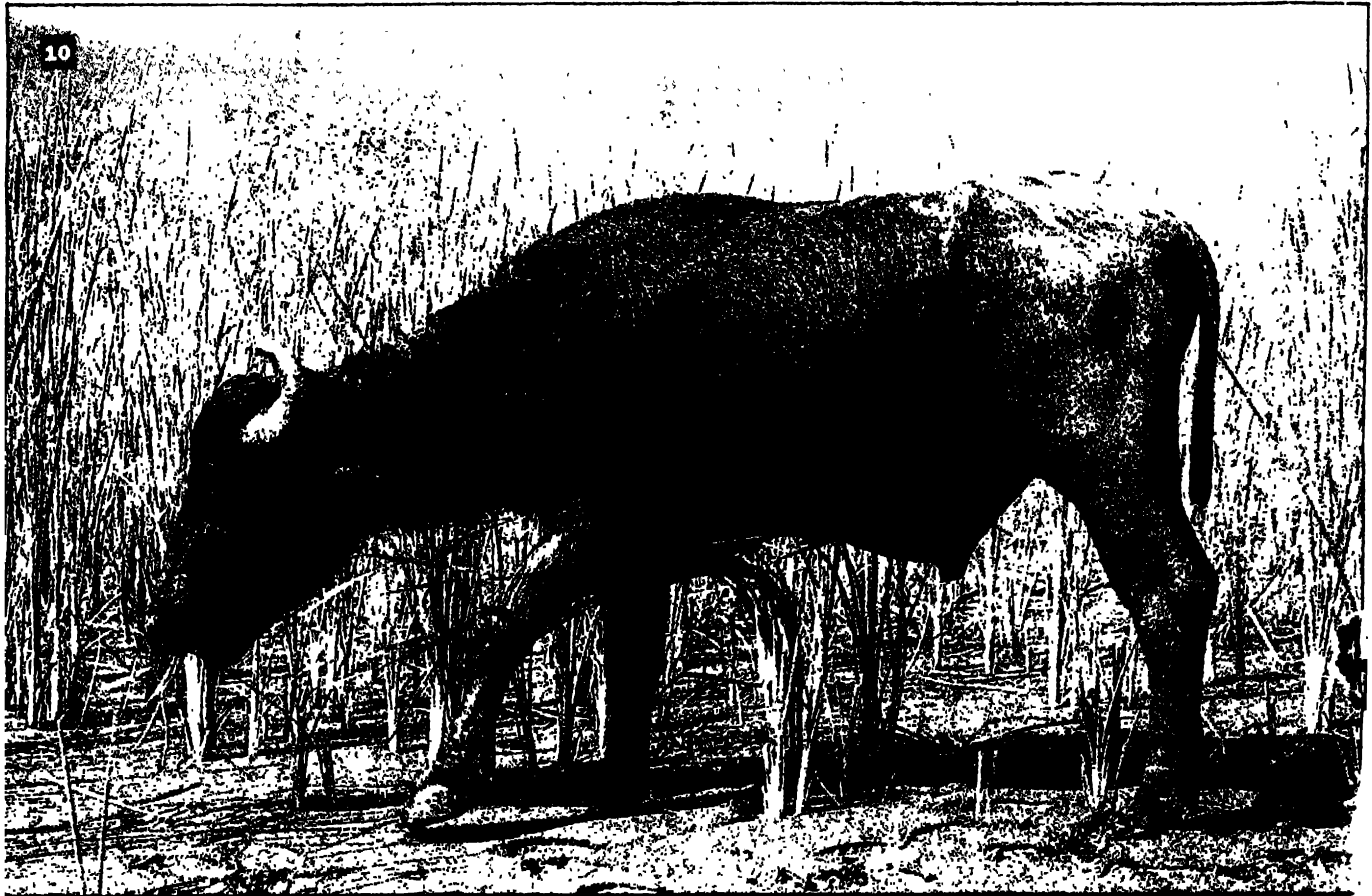
plant have given them jobs and money. But the younger and death

personnel, says Bhasin. The unit, according to him, also monitors the environment and the management of wastes. "The radiation level in the surrounding area is low and unlikely to cause any deleterious effect," he states.

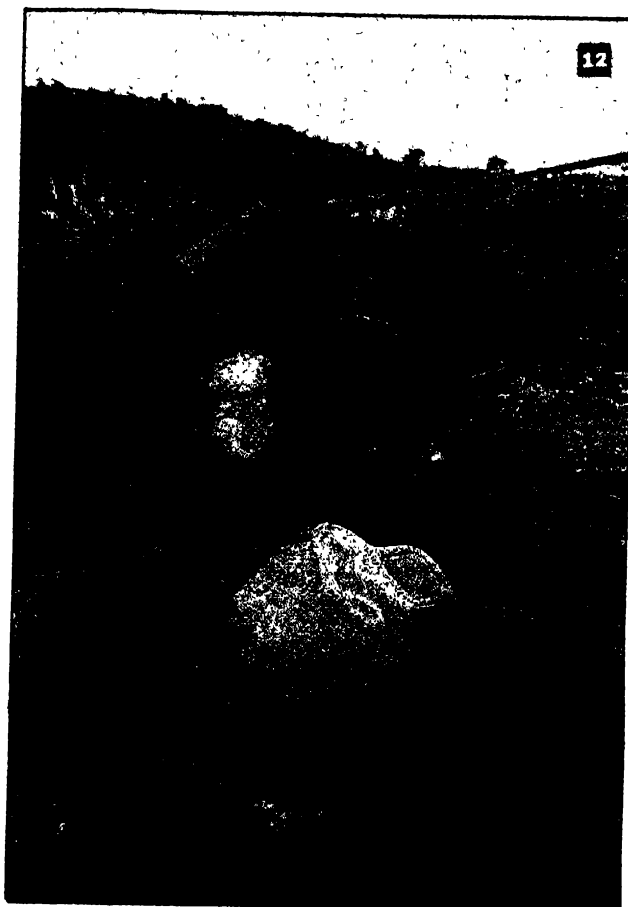
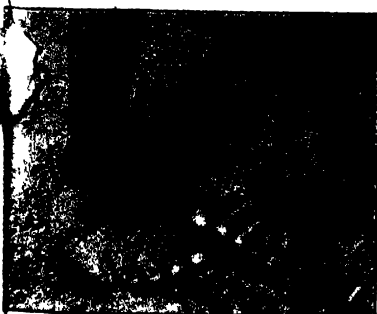
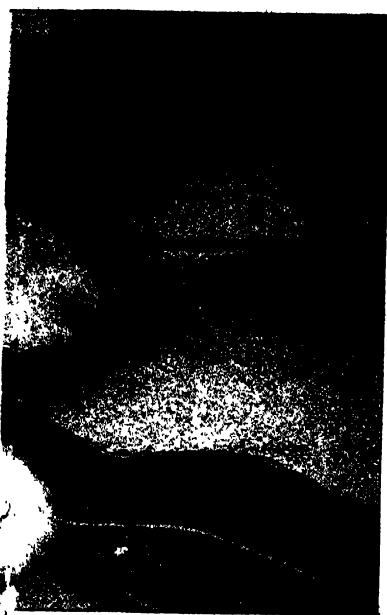
But not everyone is prepared to take such assurances at face value. While JOAR appears convinced that the people of Jaduguda have for long been exposed to radiation hazards, the environment committee of the Bihar Bidhan Parishad, which probed the situation for over two years and filed its third and final report in December 1998, is sceptical of the UCIL stand.

In its final observations, the committee has made the following recommendations:

- The extent of the radiation effect on areas close to the UCIL mines needs to be extensively studied by BARC, Trombay.
- There must be foolproof methods to ensure that the existing tailing pond, and the ones that are to be constructed in future, do not pose any radiation hazard.
- The affected people should be rehabilitated in



JOAR alleges that miners inhale uranium dust and radioactive exposure has taken a heavy toll — 17 workers died



accordance with the national rehabilitation policy.

- Measures should be taken to save all arable land from the effects of radiation, and a detailed health survey should be started.

The committee has expressed shock at the lack of safety norms at the pond site. "The people and cattle have free and unchecked access to the area around the mines. The dumping ponds are unfenced. No proper board for restricting entrance is there," it says.

As for the effluent, the committee has observed: "The waste material which contains traces of radioactive materials should be taken to the effluent treatment plant by pipes. It was noticed by the team that the water from the dumping ground returned by open drains and by open step down arrangement." The committee feared that this could lead to radioactive materials seeping into the soil and causing a "long-term" problem.

In fact, UCIL chairman Bhasin has told SUNDAY that "the treated water free from pollutants" is discharged into a

9 The 'kendu' fruits growing in the vicinity of UCIL and the tailing ponds have turned seedless, a direct fallout of mutagenesis

10 Experts suspect, this buffalo, grazing on the edge of the tailing pond, is a victim of mutagenesis (note its shortened tail) caused by radiation

11 In the village of Lipighutu, Khudiram Hansda's three-year-old son was born with deformed legs

12 The Uranium Corporation dumps dry tailings at the tailing pond site. The yellow-coloured lumps are called 'yellow cakes'

gas in the absence of protective devices. And this in 1994, 14 in 1995, 19 in 1996 and 21 in 1997

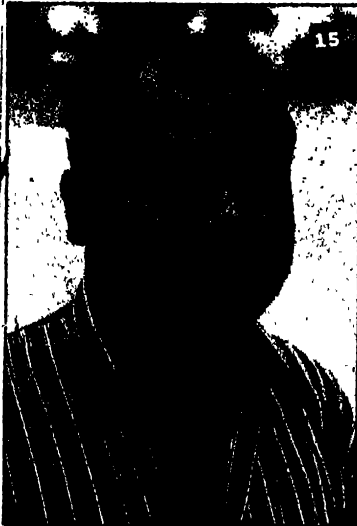
nearby stream. But the House committee probe team has detected traces of radiation — to the tune of 0.2 mr/hr — in "flowing water exposed to the public". If radioactive stuff are at all being spilled into this "nearby stream", which, in all likelihood, joins up with the Subarnarekha river system, the effects could be worrisome. Subarnarekha is one of the major rivers flowing from Bihar to West Bengal and an important source of drinking water for people living along its course.

Although there are no universally-agreed norms for disposal of nuclear waste, it is generally accepted that the dumping ground should be far from human settlements. But in Jaduguda, the tailing pond virtually lies in people's backyards.

SUNDAY spoke to several scientists at BARC and the Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics, Calcutta. And all of them, on condition of anonymity, said the disposal process in Jaduguda was far from safe. "We knew from the very beginning that this system was going to create problems. But what can you do in the face of a government



At UCIL, miners wear cotton uniforms instead of clothes, carrying radioactive uranium dust, home every



13 UCIL's open trucks carry uranium ore without cover from its Narwapahar mine to the main Jaduguda plant

14 The apparently clean water seeping out of the present tailing pond returns to the UCIL complex where an Effluent Treatment Plant (ETP) treats this water before it flows into the Subarnarekha. But, sources say, the ETP does not work on national holidays such as on 26 January, 15 August and 2 October. The seepage of highly radioactive water, during such times, continue unchecked

15 Anti-radiation activist Ghanasyam Biruli

16 Fifteen-year-old Dunia is the son of an ex-miner from UCIL. His mother suffered three miscarriages before giving birth to two physically and mentally retarded children. Dunia is one of them

decision?" said one scientist, formerly with BARC, Trombay.

Before JUMP (Jaduguda Uranium Mining Project — which became UCIL in 1965-67) started mining, Homi Bhaba, one of India's pioneering nuclear scientists, and Swedish engineers building the plant, had advised JUMP to relocate the villages Dungardihi, Chatikucha and Tilaitand, as they lay within half-a-km of the tailing pond. Despite assurances, however, they have remained where they were, even 30 years after the pond was commissioned.

While the villagers living close to the mines are believed to be suffering, the state of the miners, who go down pits 100 ft to 1,000 ft deep, is said to be equally bad.

Although UCIL claims that no effects of radiation have been seen among its workers, JOAR cites an abnormally-high death rate of miners to back its charges.

special plastic ones. What's worse, they take these week, to be washed by their wives and children



JOAR alleges that miners inhale uranium dust and radon gas in the absence of protective devices. And this deadly exposure, it claims, has taken a heavy toll — 17 workers died in 1994, 14 in 1995, 19 in 1996 and 21 in 1997.

Guidelines of the International Committee of Radiological Protection (ICRP) say that workers at an uranium plant must wear special plastic clothes. But at UCIL, miners and loaders wear ordinary cotton uniforms provided by the company. And to compound the problem, the miners carry their uniform home once a week, where the clothes, containing radioactive uranium dust, are washed by their wives and children.

Biruli claims that once JOAR's campaign gained momentum, UCIL started hiring contract labourers supplied by private contractors. Biruli estimates that nearly 1,000 such labourers are presently working in the plant. If they fall ill, they are promptly replaced.

The ICRP has set 500 millirem per year as the permissible limit of exposure to radiation. But no one knows the exposure levels of workers at UCIL. Although each employee puts on a radiation-measuring device every time he or she enters the plant, its readings are seldom made known. Moreover, when an employee falls seriously ill, he is treated at the UCIL hospital and his health records



**When an employee falls seriously ill, he is treated at
by the authorities. JOAR alleges that by doing so, UCIL wa:**

"NO ONE IS BOTHERED..."

Dr Adinarayana Gopalakrishnan on nuclear safety in India

India is a Chernobyl waiting to happen. At least, this is what Dr Adinarayana Gopalakrishnan, former chairman of the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB), fears if safety norms are not adhered to and new regulations not framed for the ten operating and four under-construction nuclear power reactors in India.

Gopalakrishnan has criticised India's nuclear establishment for its excessive secrecy and lack of accountability. Accidents in the recent past expose the lackadaisical attitude.

Gopalakrishnan points out that nowhere in the world will a reactor be operated without assessing the health of crucial locations and components from time to time.

But the main problem, according to Gopalakrishnan, lies in the subordination of the AERB to DAE. The supremacy of the DAE over the AERB, he feels, has crippled the regulatory process and compromised nuclear safety in India's nuclear plants.

Q: Is there danger to the lives of the people of Jaduguda from the uranium mines?

A: There is some amount of radiation from the UCIL plant which is to be expected. Few studies have shown that measured level of radiation in other parts of the country is higher than what it is at Jaduguda. However, at the same time, health and physical problems associated with the people there can also be found near the nuclear reactors in Rajasthan. Something has to be done...

Q: Like? Aren't any tests conducted at Jaduguda at regular intervals?

A: That's the whole point. No one has bothered to do it. The NGOs working in the area do not have the money to purchase the instrument which measures radiation levels. And the government is not interested in buying it. No one is bothered...

Q: Are safety norms adhered to near the plant?

A: The rule requires that the area near the plant must be fenced off. But the villagers often cut through the fence. The UCIL pleads helplessness, but rules must be adhered to strictly — after all, this is also their job.

There is considerable danger from the tailings pond, no matter what the UCIL and the DAE claims. The water in the pond dries up in the summer, exposing fine waste particles from the mines (which may be radioactive). The children and adults in the area often touch this waste with bare hands, thereby exposing themselves to radioactivity.

Q: What do you suggest?

A: An openness in our nuclear policy — the shroud of secrecy must go. Also, as long as the DAE holds supreme, nuclear safety will remain a distant dream. •

Pallavi Ghosh/New Delhi

are retained by the authorities. JOAR alleges that by doing so, UCIL was denying its employees their right to information.

The issue is still an open one. In the absence of clinching data, no one is in a position to pronounce a verdict. Veterans in the villages close to UCIL's placid tailing ponds concede that the mines and the plant have given them more jobs and money. But the younger lot, who have apparently grown up with an unseen force called radiation, feels that the industry has only brought them debility and death. And that makes an impartial and thorough investigation imperative. •

Sk. Azizur Rahman/Jaduguda with additional reporting by Jayanta Basu/Calcutta and Jaduguda

17 At the Rakha Mines station, labourers employed by private contractors load drums full of nuclear wastes returned from NFC, Hyderabad (dumping of nuclear wastes in AP is not allowed by the state government after it reportedly caused an unusually high number of radiation victims in the vicinity). The labourers wear leather gloves, which do not protect them from radioactivity

18 Atomic safety experts warn that water resources around the tailing ponds are likely to be contaminated

**The UCIL hospital and his health records are retained
denying its employees their right to information**

Nothing to worry

The DAE and the Uranium Corporation give their side of the story

The Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) dismisses any threat to the lives of the people of Jaduguda through radiation from the UCIL plant in south Bihar. UCIL and the DAE also do not accept that the waste discharged from the mines is radioactive. The DAE points out that UCIL adheres strictly to safety norms and the waste is treated to rule out any possibility of radiation.

Fifty per cent of the waste is backfilled in the mine itself and the remaining low-specific activity waste is treated and retained in the specially-designed tailing pond. The spokesperson at DAE reassures that there is no question of the residue flowing out of the tailing pond into the backyards of the villagers.

The Environmental Survey Laboratory of the health physics unit of BARC has regularly measured the level of radioactivity in the area. Simultaneous checks have also been conducted at different locations over a radius of around 35 km taking Jaduguda as the centre. The UCIL claims that frequent study reveals that the radiation level measured in Jaduguda matches that of locations surrounding the area.

There is considerable concern over the quality of drinking water available to the residents of Jaduguda. The DAE considers such fears unfounded. The WHO limit for uranium content, claims the DAE, in drinking water is 160 mg/cu.m and the AERB limit is 100 mg/cu.m while the water flowing down the stream of UCIL is only 38 mg/cu.m — far below the permitted limit. The DAE also claims that the uranium content of the ore being low, bulk of the material processed emerges as waste, called tailings.

The tailings, comprising gangue material and barren liquor, is neutralised to raise the pH to 10 to precipitate the dissolved products of uranium decay and chemical pollutants. The neutralised tailings are then separated into coarse and fine fractions in a hydrocyclone classifier. The coarse material is fitted back in the mine voids and the fine fractions are pumped through a pipe line into the tailing pond. The solids settle down and are permanently retained in the pond. The clear liquid is filtered to the effluent-treatment plant (ETP) where it is clarified to be re-used in mill operations.

Mine water from Jaduguda is also clarified and re-used in the mill and water from nearby mines is brought to the ETP. These effluents are clarified and a substantial portion is recycled to the mill and majority of the effluents is reused for conservation of this precious natural resource. The rest is treated chemically to remove the dissolved radium-226 and finally with lime to remove the chemical pollutants. Only treated water meeting the prescribed standards is released to the local aqua-



tic system of Gara-Subarnarekha rivers. A large part of the filled-up tailing ponds is further stabilised by growing different types of wild, non-edible vegetation to prevent generation and dispersal of the dust.

The DAE refuses to accept the criticism of improper discharge of effluents from the plant. They claim that the UCIL's operations are discharged only after treatment at the ETP. The effluent quality is regularly monitored by the health physics unit of BARC to ensure that the quality parameters of the discharges are within those stipulated.

The DAE concedes that there may be some discharge of radioactivity into the environment through the mining operations, but this is within permissible limits. The UCIL management conducts regular checks on the gamma radiation levels. Environmental thermoluminescent dosimeters are deployed at different locations in the vicinity of the plant to monitor the annual gamma radiation exposure levels which are found to vary from 770 ugy/y to 1866 ugy/y with an average of 1179 ugy/y — well within the range of natural background radiation observed in Bihar.

DAE officials categorically dismiss any link possible radiation from the mines. They say Jaduguda

HOW THE WASTE IS TREATED

- 1.** The actual uranium content of the uranium ore is a mere 0.3-0.7 per cent. The remaining is waste which has to be treated to rule out the possibility of radioactivity.
- 2.** The waste (tailings) is treated with lime so as to neutralise its acidity. What emerges is the daughter products containing fine (called slimes) and coarse particles.
- 3.** Both these particles are passed through a churner called hydrocyclone classifier. In this churner, the coarse particles accumulate outside the container while the fine ones are deposited inside.
- 4.** The coarse particles go back to the mines, and the grooves created by extracting the ore are filled with these particles.
- 5.** The slimes are pumped through a pipe into the tailing pond. In this pond, the fine particles settle down at the bottom.
- 6.** The overlying liquid is pumped back into the plant where it is re-used for various plant purposes.
- 7.** This liquid is treated time to time with lime and other chemicals to remove pollutants.

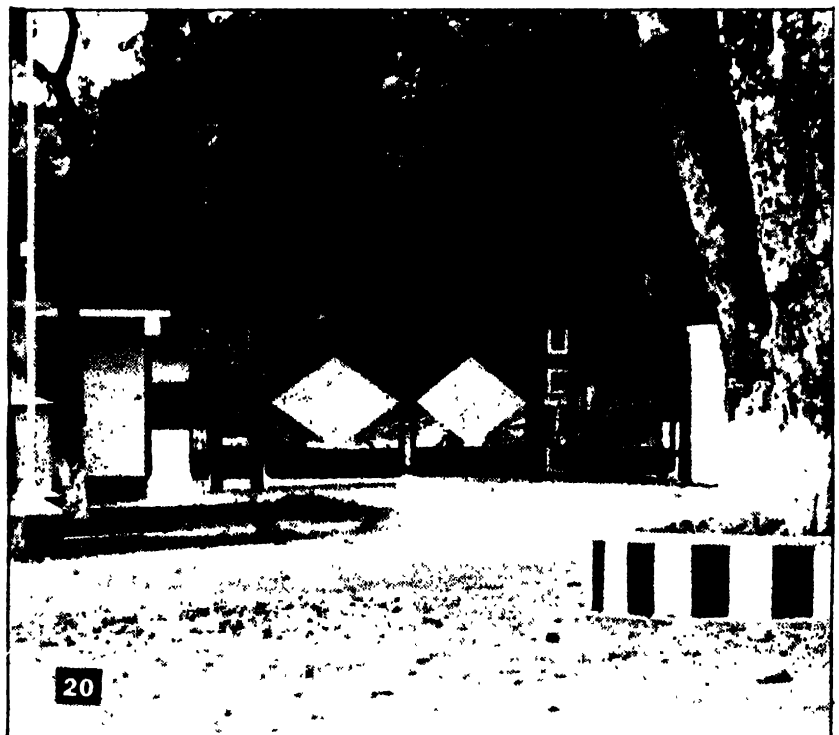
19 Construction of the third tailing pond going on, near the village of Chatkucha

20 UCIL premises in Jaduguda

The DAE officials point out that the earth's crust contains a small amount of radioactive isotopes like uranium and thorium. They categorically dismiss any link between the disability and deficiency shown in the villagers and possible radiation from the mines. They point out that Jaduguda is an isolated tribal area with practically no medical facility. They also claim that diseases like leprosy, TB and related ailments are common because of acute malnutrition. Twenty-nine cases were isolated to test the claim that there was any link between radiation and disability.

A study conducted by the state government, UCIL and Tata Meharbai cancer hospital concluded that the cases under review had congenital limb anomalies, diseases due to genetic abnormalities like Thalassemia major. Further, pigmentation, moderate to gross splenomegaly due to chronic malarial infection, malnutrition, post-encephalitis and post-head injury sequel cannot be ascribed to radiation exposure. •

Pallavi Ghosh/New Delhi



between the disability shown in the villagers and
is an isolated tribal area with no medical facility

SONIA'S SONG

We will and will not topple the BJP government

The last time Sonia Gandhi, the Congress president, visited Calcutta, it was before the 1998 parliamentary elections. She addressed meetings in the city and districts of West Bengal. Result: though her campaign increased the Congress' overall tally at the hustings, it managed to win only one seat in West Bengal — Ghani Khan Chowdhury from Malda. Last week, on 26-27 March, a year after she completed her tenure as the Congress chief, Sonia visited Calcutta again.

She came to attend a seminar organised by the Spastics Society of Eastern India and the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People at the Taj Bengal hotel, and to hand over Swami Vivekananda's two letters written to the Maharaja of Khetri in 1893 to the swamijis of the Ramakrishna Mission at Belur Math. And also used the visit to meet the Congress legislators and office-bearers of the reconstituted West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee (WBPPC).

But there was more to the visit than met the eye. At her meeting with the legislators, Sonia clarified her stand regarding politics at the Centre but seemed to be keeping her options

open. It was also clear that for her feedback on the political situation in West Bengal, she didn't want to depend solely on PCC heavyweights Ghani Khan Chowdhury, Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, and CWC members and general secretaries Pranab Mukherjee and Ghulam Nabi Azad.

In a closed-door meeting, Sonia told Congressmen that she didn't approve of the policies being pursued by the BJP-led government at the Centre. Insiders say that she spoke vehemently against "atrocities on minorities", the use of archaeological sites for communal programmes and the rise of religious fundamentalism. She accused the Centre of failing to deliver and was said to have told her partymen that the increasing inner-party squabbles within the *sangh parivar* were likely to bring down the BJP-led government like a house of cards.

She demanded that the report of the Srikrishna Commission, which probed the Bombay riots, be made public and made it clear that the Congress was going to press for a JPC probe to find out the truth behind Admiral Bhagwat's sacking. And to fight for these demands, she said the Congress would demonstrate both inside and outside Parliament.

But do such things concern the state legislators? Appa-



SONIA GANDHI WITH THE SWAMIJIS AT BELUR MATH: Political mileage?

rently, they don't. But, then, Sonia knew that her views would soon filter out of the hall and reach the mandarins at the CPI(M) state party headquarters at Alimuddin Street in Calcutta. Thus, Sonia was categorically spreading the message that it was not the Left but the BJP that was the Congress' main enemy.

Last year, at the 16th Party Congress of the CPI(M), Jyoti Basu and party general secretary Harkishen Singh Surjeet had said that the BJP should go, and that the Left was willing to support a Congress-led alternative government at the Centre. Since then, there have been several rounds of talks between the CPI(M) bosses and Sonia. But nothing concrete has emerged so far.

The reason for this is simple. Sonia knows that the Left (if it props up the Congress at the Centre) will only provide an issue-based support, and on economic policies, the two sides were unlikely to concur. In that case, the Congress government would have to survive on 'daily wages'. So Sonia has thought it better to wait than to form an hasty alliance with the Left.

There are other compulsions as well, and they are at the



SONIA GANDHI: *Treading cautiously*

state level. What if the Congress openly declares its inclination to go with the Left and the BJP-led coalition doesn't fall? Such a scenario will completely jeopardise the Congress' vote-bank in West Bengal. The Assembly elections are due in the state in early 2001 and any alliance before that will only affirm Mamata Banerjee's charge that the state Congress is the 'B team' of the Left Front in West Bengal.

What's more, it might give an added advantage to the Trinamul-BJP alliance and wash out the Congress in the Assembly polls — a situation which no Congress president would dare desire.

Not surprisingly, Sonia Gandhi is moving cautiously. In fact, she's in no hurry to topple the present government at the Centre. Under no circumstances does she want herself to be seen as the force behind a toppling drama and give Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and the BJP an edge at the next parliamentary polls. "We want the BJP government to collapse by itself," said Ghulam Nabi Azad.

At the same time, Sonia also wants to keep her options open. It's almost three years now (from 1996) that the Congress has been out of power. Several senior Congressmen appear to be unhappy over this situation. They also fear that the BJP might succeed in consolidating its position if given more time to rule. As a result, many CWC members are said to have urged Sonia to get along with the toppling game.

But didn't Sonia say in Calcutta that there will be no truck with the Left? Again, on the same day in Delhi, didn't Arjun Singh, a member of Sonia's inner-circle, say that the Congress wasn't averse to the idea of a coalition government at the Centre? And that an alternative government would include the Left. Sounds contradictory? Not really.

"At present there is no contradiction. What the Congress president says stands. In case the government falls the situation will be studied once again. Of course, there has to be a coalition because the MPs don't want an election. So let the time come, the picture will unravel itself," said Pranab Mukherjee. A cleverly-worded statement. Full of possibilities.

As of now, Sonia knows if the BJP government were to fall and the Congress decides to form a government at the Centre, her options would be very few: the Congress won't tie up with Laloo and Mulayam. Jayalalitha, with her caprice and several pending court cases, would prove to be more of a liability than an asset. And as for Mamata Banerjee, she would not return to the Congress unless Sonia sacks those PCC leaders who had humiliated her. A demand which the Congress president is not willing to meet immediately.



GHULAM NABI AZAD AND PRANAB MUKHERJEE:
Echoing Sonia's views

Several senior Congressmen fear that the BJP might succeed in consolidating its position if given more time to rule. As a result, many CWC members are said to have urged Sonia to get along with the toppling game

That leaves her only with the Left. Right now, both the Left apparatchiks and several Congress leaders are waiting for the kill. But Sonia isn't. Because she doesn't want the Congress to be at the mercy of other party leaders within a coalition.

So what does the future hold? "Right now, it's very difficult to predict the political developments. As an Opposition party, we're keeping a close watch on the BJP. We'll not topple this government, we'll wait for it to die naturally," said Pranab Mukherjee.

So, for the time being, as the Right and Left wait and watch, it's the Centre that provides all the action. •

Arindam Sarkar/Calcutta



Parades by the Pakistani (left) and Indian armies: talking is better than shooting

Track three

The murder of Hindus in Jammu on the same day that Pakistan's army, air force and navy chiefs did not come to welcome Atal Behari Vajpayee at Wagah barely affected the celebration of his summit meeting with Nawaz Sharif at Lahore.

But more than a month since, the terrorism of the ISI-controlled Lashkar-e-Toiba in Jammu and the military's defiance of their Prime Minister at Wagah are becoming facts as hard to ignore as Sharif's warm hug of Vajpayee or the 19-gun salute in the distance.

Not only have politicians on both sides renewed their possessive statement-war about Kashmir, but defen-

Indo-Pak parleys cannot succeed without the two armies talking

ce officials say that as many militants are being pushed into Kashmir this summer as the last one under Pakistani Army cover.

Can there then be any peace with Pakistan where the Pakistani Army or the ISI are not participants? Should Nawaz Sharif be persuaded to bring them in for negotiations? Will they come? Will it work for the Indian Army to open a dialogue with Pakistan's forces?

Some answers to some questions:

Nawaz Sharif vs the army

Will Pakistan's Prime Minister bring in the army for talks?

Very unlikely. Since coming to power with an overwhelming majority in the National Assembly, Sharif has outlawed presidential powers to dismiss an elected government, installed his nominee as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and forced one of Pakistan's finest army chiefs, General Jehangir Karamat, to resign.

But he is not finished with the army yet. Karamat's successor is General Pervez Musharraf, who is a Mohajir and therefore commands far less following than a Punjabi army chief of Pakistan's predo-



minantly Punjabi army would have. He was No. 3 in seniority. The Indian defence ministry expected Lt-Gen. Ali Khan, a distinguished, suave, pro-American Punjabi corps commander, to take Karamat's place. He was sidelined. But the army didn't react.

General Musharraf has not moved to get the army out of its civilian commitments: 30,000 troops and officers are engaged by the Water & Power Development Authority; hundreds of others are managing civilian trucking operations from Karachi to the hinterland up to Peshawar; and army officers are trying Pakistanis in the strife-torn Punjab and Sindh provinces.

The Supreme Court has ruled that these military courts are illegal. Their judgements have angered Pakistanis. A retired Indian general of the intelligence corps says, "However fair an army court ruling may be, the civilians resent it. It gives the army a bad name. I think Nawaz Sharif wants the army to get a bad name through these special courts. He wants to consolidate his hold over it." Either the army hasn't woken up to this design or it is too divided to protest.

After confronting each other for 50 years across lush plains, desert and ice, both armies at least at middle levels have formed demonic images of the other

After Musharraf, Sharif has made another surprise appointment. Mohammed Aziz Khan, a Pashtun, the youngest Pakistani Army lieutenant-general who has not even commanded a corps, is the new chief of general staff. His promotion has surprised the Indian MoD even more than Musharraf's.

And now, it is not even certain that Musharraf will continue. It is very likely that the director-general of the Inter-Services Intelligence, Zia-ud-din, partly

Kashmiri and very close to the PM, will take over. In that case, Musharraf will be promoted to joint chief of staff which is a powerless position.

In this situation, Sharif will be loath to accept Indian suggestions to rope in the army for talks. It will give it legitimacy which he is trying to deny it. Besides, he can well argue that armies have no role in peace talks between two democracies.

Lessons after Zia

If Sharif is weakening the army and gaining control, isn't it in our interest?

Yes, and no. While it is true that an overarmed Pakistani Army attacked India in 1965 and was confident of victory in 1971, a Pakistani Army weakened beyond a point threatens the existence of Pakistan itself which is not in India's interests.

A broken-up Pakistan will be troublesome for the neighbourhood and if the splinter that inherits its nuclear arsenal bore enmity with India, unprecedented nuclear blackmail would ensue. The

Pakistani Army, with all its faults, remains a binding force.

The second fear is of a coup. At one level, this is far-fetched because General Mirza Aslam Beg and the others who succeeded Gen. Zia-ul-Haq after his death in 1988 as army chief have determinedly kept away from power. They have seen the failure of three martial-law administrators — Gen. Ayub Khan, Gen. Yahya Khan and Gen. Zia himself — in trying to give better administration than the politicians they overthrew.

But no army that has been in power and considers itself the last repository of nationalism can take the squeeze too long. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto ravaged the Pakistani Army after its 1971 defeat and picked up an unknown, friendless, fol-

Talking, not shooting

But what is the advantage of the Pakistani and Indian armies talking to each other that is not there when politicians or diplomats talk?

There may be no immediate advantages. But after confronting each other for 50 years across lush plains, desert and ice, both armies at least at middle levels have formed demonic images of the other: the Pakistanis more so.

For instance, one of their staff college manuals describes India's nuclear aims dangerously as the outcome of Brahminism and Chanakya's statecraft with no attempt being made even to examine the threats that it says it perceives. And the



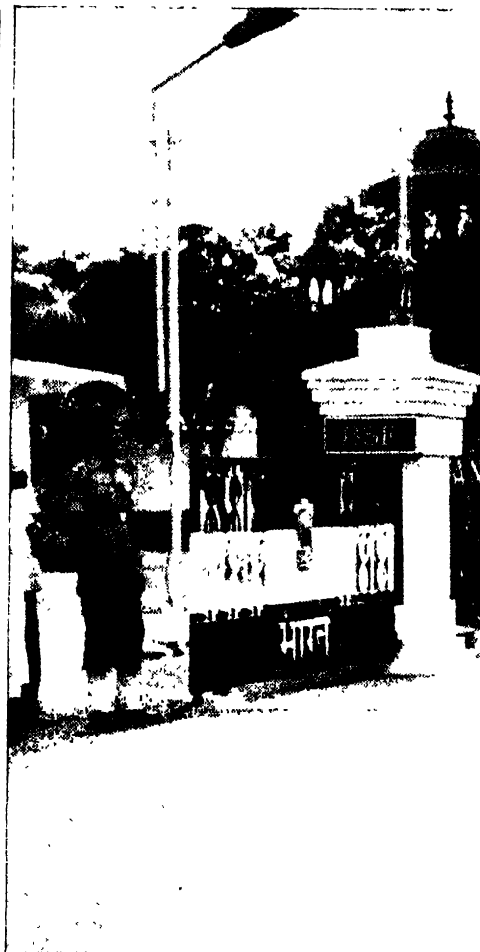
China has not forgotten George Fernandes describing it as India's threat No. 1 (which he later denied) after the visiting PLA chief, Gen. Fu Quan You, sent home positive reports

lowerless lieutenant-general as his army chief and called him his monkey-general before visitors and state guests. But once Gen. Zia had an opportunity, he hanged Bhutto.

Sharif is also walking that thin ice. Trading professionalism for bootlicking could bring immediate advantages. But while Gen. Karamat would never contemplate a coup, anyone else could. So a well-knit, professional Pakistani Army is as much in Sharif's interest as in India's.

image of the Pakistani Army is of a uniformly Islamic, jehadic army that is less than factual.

At senior levels there is greater appreciation of reality. Opposing directors-general of military operations become friends staving off crisis after crisis on hotlines. When Indian and Pakistani military delegations met alternatively in Delhi and Islamabad first during Benazir Bhutto and Rajiv Gandhi's time and later when Narasimha Rao was PM, they



realised that they were fighting a mad, unwinnable war in Siachen.

And yet, such exchanges are limited. One place where Pakistani and Indian brigadiers have interacted for years now is in London's Belgravia while doing the Royal College of Defence Studies course.

Most retired Indian generals have happy remembrances of these meetings but none of them could make any penetrative observations of their Pakistani coursemates. "We just steered off discussing core issues," said one of them. "They were also very guarded."

It is this closing up that could slowly go if the two armies were to meet. It is by no means certain that they will. Gen. Beg first expressed a desire to an Indian military attache in Islamabad of getting the two armies together but when the attache came back with concrete proposals for sporting links the offer went into deep freeze.

Later, Indian Army chief Gen. Rodrigues sent an invitation to the Pakistani chief, Gen. Arif Nawaz, for a visit which



The Wagah border: the Pakistani forces' chiefs did not come to welcome the Indian Prime Minister

record, however, no serving officer will accept anything less than Pakistan's return of the "occupied" territories.

The situation within the Pakistani Army is more complicated. Former military attaches to Pakistan tell you of the extraordinary understanding that Baluch, Mohajir and Pathan generals have shown for the Indian position on Kashmir but not by and large the Punjabi generals.

They, more than any of the others, have seen the 1971 defeat and Pakistan's partition in terms of an "assault on their manhood" and are not yet ready to give up Kashmir. But in public, even those other non-Punjabis have been known to take tough positions against India.

Politicians also force the Pakistani generals to become inflexible. In the first round of the Siachen negotiations, for example, the two sides had agreed on their respective pull-back positions but Pakistani politicians would not let their army sign the agreement even though India had taken more risks than Pakistan.

And, only last May, Nawaz Sharif boxed in the Pakistani Army again by ordering the tit-for-tat nuclear explosions in Chagai hills. The Indian defence ministry's information is that Gen. Karamat had consulted his nine corps commanders and told the Prime Minister not to detonate.

He stressed, it seems, on the return advantage of availing conventional arms support from America and the others that could grow to a point where India crunched by US sanctions wouldn't be able to keep up.

"Karamat is not a pacifist but a realist," said an MoD analyst, "he had made a cold logical deduction. In a couple of years they would have outstripped us conventionally. So we had to get them into the same kind of shit that we had gotten into. We felt that Pakistan must be provoked to go nuclear."

The inevitable happened. Sharif apparently made allusions to Karamat's cowardice at a full Cabinet meeting. It is not clear if he told the PM that his corps commanders also didn't want to go nuclear. It is very likely that the rank and file of the army wouldn't have accepted that decision after Sharif's TV demagoguery. Anyhow, not long after that, Karamat resigned.

All this has made Pakistani generals

didn't materialise. Still afterwards, Gen. Karamat spoke favourably of army-to-army contacts to a retired visiting Indian lieutenant-general but nothing came of it.

There is little to suggest that the Indian government will allow the army to talk with the Pakistani one after having kept it in seclusion for years. But still it is the Pakistani Army that has shown more reluctance to discuss. And yet, as it seems, there is no escape from that. Both armies realise that talking is better than shooting.

The biggest misperception that a dialogue may remove is that the *raison d'être* for the Pakistani Army is the presence of an Indian threat. Most Indian officers repeat this unthinkingly, thereby making truth out of a lie. The way to get around it is: a) to deny the existence of a threat and b) to accept Pakistan's right to have an army whether or not there is a threat, because it is a sovereign nation.

But the single-largest gain of an army-army get-together would be the conclu-

sive realisation that neither army can snatch the other's portion of Kashmir without provoking a full — may be nuclear — war. "When soldiers talk, they talk the same language," said a former vice-chief of the Indian Army. "Once it is clear that a military solution is not possible, but that a political-diplomatic negotiation is the only way out, it would soften stands."

Limitations of a dialogue

How far can the two armies go?

This is easier to answer for the Indian Army: as far as its civilian watchdogs will let it go, which, surprisingly, is rather quite far. There is greater acceptance within the Indian Army of converting the Line of Control (LoC) into an international border.

Some generals even favour restoring pre-1953 autonomy to Kashmir and relaxing travel restrictions for Kashmiris across the LoC until eventually it becomes little more than a map line. On

afraid of their own shadows. They are probably more hard line than they would like to be. This makes it even more difficult to hope for open discussions between the two armies if and when that happens. But as long as that does not occur, Pakistani generals will be as much prisoners of their politicians as the politicians have been of theirs before this, and who knows maybe one more time again.

India. Transfer of Chinese nuclear technology and materials has reportedly ceased since China signed the CTBT and under American pressure but conventional arms exports and exchange of personnel remain large-scale.

Perhaps of all the armies, the PLA today has the most influence on the Pakistani Army. But it is unlikely that China would have mediated even if relations with India were level. And besides,

Middle-level officers and those that Gen. Zia brought in from lower and lower-middle-class families after he seized power are as religious as they are anti-American. It is this section that would have protested if Pakistan had failed to explode the atom bombs under American influence.

Until some years ago, the Americans were the best-informed about the Pakistani Army. "Their International Military Education Programme ensured a dialogue with the moderate elements in the Pakistani Army," says a retired major-general and defence analyst. "It increased their knowledge of the Pakistani Army. But it was cut off due to the Pressler Amendment leaving a gap. This is causing concern to Pentagon."

However, with all the handicaps, it is the fear of nuclear proliferation and the terror of a nuclear war that is keeping Americans engaged with India and Pakistan. Their own solution to the Kashmir problem is to make it independent. Neither India nor Pakistan accepts that. But they know that if they stick to the nuclear turf, they have better chances of getting the two countries to be reasonable about Kashmir.

So even if no one wants them to mediate, they are at it.



Sharif has forced one of Pakistan's finest army chiefs, General Jehangir Karamat (right), to resign. Karamat had reportedly advised him against the Chagai explosion

No bhai-bhai

Can the Chinese help break this logjam? "Chinese? Help? You? Hell no," says an Indian expert on the People's Liberation Army. "First you have to mend your wrecked relations with them."

China has not forgotten George Fernandes' repeated statements that it is India's threat No. 1 (he says he was misquoted as saying enemy No. 1) after the visiting PLA chief to India, Gen. Fu Quan You, sent back home positive reports. And it has not entirely forgiven India after Atal Behari Vajpayee's leaked letter to Bill Clinton cited the Chinese threat for the May '98 detonations. There is evidence that China targeted its IRBMs towards India after these developments.

It has also brought the PLA still closer to the Pakistani Army than after 1965 when the Americans "ditched" the Pakistanis for starting the war with

no Indian government would accept Chinese mediation until they do not return the piece of Kashmir they keep.

The American factor

Would the Americans be willing?

More than willing. But there are problems with their mediation. It is not just that India will refuse, even though the diplomatic and military circuits are buzzing about the American pressure on Vajpayee and Sharif to meet. It is also that American influence is limited in Pakistan.

The US defence department has probably more leverage with the Pakistani Army than the state department has with its politicians and diplomats but it is not of an order to get it to any negotiating table right away. No self-respecting Pakistani general would accept that.

Also, the officer cadre that was pro-American up to 1965 is less so now.

Who controls the ISI?

Finally, what do you do about the ISI?

Damned little, just now. Intelligence sources say that Sharif was shocked by the Hindu killings in Jammu but they also admit that there is little evidence that the ISI ordered them. "The ISI controls the Lashkar-e-Toiba but our information is that the Lashkar massacred the Hindus on their own," said an officer.

This is bad enough. To stop the Lashkar means to stop the ISI? Can anyone in Pakistan do that?

The prevailing myth about the ISI is that it is beyond anyone's control. Many visiting Pakistani generals have told Indian officers after nine fingers of whisky that the Pakistani Army is still in charge of it. But they also make clear that they don't care to be associated with it.

If Nawaz Sharif has his way, this strange relationship will end soon. Defence ministry officials say that he is planning on bringing civilians into the ISI. It will be the best news to come from Pakistan after 20 February. •

N.V. Subramanian/New Delhi

Protracted war

Why the police clashed with the public at Darbhanga: the inside story

It was a case of locals versus the district police. What began as another incident of lampooning the establishment, led to a violent street fight. So much so that an 18-hour night curfew was clamped on Darbhanga town in north Bihar, which has been subsequently lifted on 28 March. But, according to locals, the tension has not ceased yet and the situation is still potentially volatile.

It all started with a procession taken out on the occasion of Ramnavami. It had tableaux depicting the recent Senari carnage in Jehanabad district, and also a caricature of the fodder scam. "It were, in fact," said Manohar Das, an eyewitness, "caricatures of the lady superintendent of police, Shobha Ohatkar and the Darbhanga MP, M.A.A. Fatmi, that the local police felt bad about and intercepted the procession."

The moment the police tore the cartoons and the placards, all hell broke loose. The agitated processionists started pelting stones at the local police and the district officials present there. District magistrate of Darbhanga, Ajay Kumar, was injured. Soon thereafter, the entire Tower Chowk area, the scene of the skirmish, wore the look of an army cantonment. "The entire police force of the district seemed to have converged there and clashed with the civilians," said Mohammed Mohsin, an eyewitness. An 18-hour curfew was clamped and shoot-at-sight orders issued. In the melee, a company of Rapid Action Force had arrived, to make the place look like a veritable battleground.

Nasim Ahmed, who came to Patna to celebrate Idd-ul-zoha, told SUNDAY that the worst sufferers were the students, caught unawares by the curfew.

Actually, the story has its root elsewhere. On 4 January, Delhi Police nabbed five members of the Irfan Goga-Babloo Srivastav gang. They were interrogated by the joint commissioner, South Zone, Amod Kanth.

It was found during the interrogation that all five criminals were from Darbhanga district. And that they were in regular contact with a Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) MP from Bihar. The criminals also divulged that once when all of them, including their leader, Fazal alias



Babloo Srivastav: violent ways

Tanvir were present in the house of the said MP, superintendent of police Shobha Ohatkar had tried to raid the house and arrest them. According to the arrested criminals, the SP had raided their hideout and got them firmly behind the bars before they could buy their way out.

It was then that the criminals were directed by Irfan Goga in Dubai to strike a deal of Rs 10 lakh and get the SP transferred. For this they are alleged to have got in touch with the RJD MP. The directive from Dubai is supposed to have stated that if the transfer fails to materialise, the SP was to be eliminated.

But the RJD MP from Darbhanga, M.A.A. Fatmi, vehemently denies having any link with the arrested criminals. According to him, the police is trying to malign his image and frame him. The

state government, on its part, maintained a studied silence, until it was forced to declare that Shobha Ohatkar will not be shifted. Sources told SUNDAY that the SP was, in fact, on her way out of the district. A timely intervention from the IPS Officers' Association, led by Arvind Pandey, saved the situation.

Under such circumstances, the rioting incident seems to be another ploy to malign the SP and raise a demand for getting her shifted elsewhere, said an IPS officer on terms of anonymity.

Although the curfew has been lifted, the atmosphere seems far from normal in Darbhanga, at the moment. If the pounding of boots on the near-deserted streets by Rapid Action Force men is any indication. •

Naved Zahir/Darbhanga

I STILL REMEMBER when I first met Ananda Shankar. It was at a New Year's Eve party in Calcutta on 31 December, 1986. He was surprised, I think, to find that I knew his work so well. More surprised when I said that I thought his first album had been a landmark.

Sadly, few people still remember that album, recorded in America in the early 1970s, at the height of Ananda's uncle, Ravi Shankar's tie-dye phase when the sitar was, to use the language of the times, the grooviest instrument around. While Ravi Shankar had been content to play lighter ragas to audiences too stoned to know much better ("If you like the tuning up so much, I hope you will like the music more," he admonished the audience at the concert for Bangladesh in 1971), Ananda had the sense to try and fuse rock and Indian music.

The album came with a modest disclaimer on the sleeve note ("I claim no connection with the famous Shankars") and most people who bought it did not realise that Ananda was Uday Shankar's son or, indeed, who Uday Shankar was. They bought it for the music. There were sitar reworkings of two rock standards: *Light My Fire* and *Jumping Jack Flash*, that quickly became classics in their own right — Ananda's *Jumping Jack Flash* remained the theme of a rock programme on British TV throughout the Seventies.

But, for me at least, there were two other high spots on the album. The first was a tune called *Snowflower*, composed by Ananda himself. And the second was the innovative use of the synthesiser (still called the Moog in those days and best known for such novelty songs as *Hot Butter's Popcorn*). It was already something of a breakthrough to use the sitar in a rock context. To combine it with a high-tech instrument like the synthesiser marked a double breakthrough.

Ananda never followed up on that album. He returned to India — in 1986, he was to complain that recording facilities in our country were still far more primitive than those required to record something like the first album — and immersed himself in other kinds of fusion music. He married the beautiful Tanushree and together they ran a music and dance troupe.

Ananda had many other successes. He performed at various Festivals of India, made many remarkable albums and wrote many memorable tunes. Tanushree and he became regulars at such special events as the World Cup and it was hard to live in Calcutta and not know who they were.

But somehow — at least to my mind — Ananda never got the credit he deserved. If you listen to the first album today — and it has stood the test of time — it is clear that he single-handedly invented what we call Indipop today: a genre of music that blended Indian melodies with rock

without borrowing from Hindi film tunes. Without that breakthrough, there would be no Colonial Cousins, no Silk Route and, perhaps, no Indian Ocean.

Why didn't Ananda move more to the centre of the stage? I have two theories, one obvious and the other, slightly more controversial. The first is simple enough: he was ahead of his time. He made albums at a time when LP records were cumbersome to maintain and sold in tiny numbers. Had he been young in the Nineties, he would have found greater commercial success. But then, of course, he wouldn't have been a pioneer or the founder of the genre.

My second theory is even simpler, if more contentious: he never rode the national mainstream because he lived in Calcutta. However successful he was in the Bengal capital, he remained on the periphery of the consciousness of fans in the major cities of Bombay, Delhi and Bangalore. It is crazy — but nevertheless, true — that people in Bombay will embrace anything that comes out of Los Angeles (such as the first album) but will turn their noses up at anything that comes out of Calcutta. Ananda took pride in being a Bengali and in living in Calcutta. It brought him joy but in commercial terms,

he paid the price.

Because Tanushree will keep his legacy alive, there is no danger of us forgetting Ananda Shankar or his music. But perhaps in death, we can give him the recognition we denied him in life: this was the father of Indipop. •

Vir Sanghvi

Ananda Shankar



1942 — 1999

Fun and games

The launch of DD's Sports Channel saw more of the former than the latter



So the BJP government gave TV viewers a special gift on its first birthday: its very own Sports Channel. Three hours to begin with and an example of how it

should not be used in future, we hope, was a jumping session by Shekhar Suman of *Movers and Shakers* fame as the anchor for the inauguration. He moved and shook so much that he had to hang on for dear life to the long script given to him, written in *shudh* Hindi. And he read it like a *filmi neta*, all blood and thunder and patriotic slogans. His histrionics, the paratroopers from the IAF, and the speeches from politicians took up more than an hour, with Kirti Azad doing a Ravi Shastri when required, while the crowds waited impatiently for the cricket they had come to watch. As the *mananiya suchana mantri* put it, the wicked foreign sports channels neglect Indian sport (although the Jaipur Indo-Pak cricket match was carried by ESPN, for one). And it is time we had a proper Indian channel. Unless, of course, he meant that they don't carry *kabbadi* and *hu-tu-tu*, which this DD channel presumably will.

But the real question remains: how will it compete with the highly-professional 24-hour international sports channels which give us the cream of international cricket, football and tennis, with only three hours of its own? Even the forthcoming world cup is out of its reach because DD will only show matches with India in them. And probably they will have to rob Peter to pay Paul if matches are carried in full and not just for three hours. Because on the occasion of the launch of the Sports Channel, Bengali viewers in Delhi, and presumably in other parts of India, found they had to give up their Bengali regional programme and watch cricket instead. Clearly DD has to get its priorities right and not indulge in the sort of hop step and jump which characterised its old bad habits, cutting off a Wimbledon

final at match point or the last over of a one-day cricket match because they had to switch over to the news.

After sports, we come to two vital decisions for the future of the media. First, autonomy. This columnist has maintained down the years that no government, no matter what the party or the coalition, will ever give autonomy to the media. And they will do everything in their power to prevent foreign channels offering competition to the dull fare dished out by DD. It is in the Fifties that

did nothing about autonomy. Jaipal Reddy also made loud noises and did not interfere as much with the workings of DD. But he made some disastrous appointments for Prasar Bharati on the eve of his government's departure, no doubt prodded by I.K. Gujral. He waived the age limits clearly laid down even if his appointees had good credentials.

Autonomy, one may be sure, is very far off and will probably never come as no government will give up this wonderful propaganda weapon and ministers



Shekhar Suman's (left) histrionics, the paratroopers from the IAF, and the politicians' speeches took up more than an hour, while the crowds waited impatiently for cricket

the admirable Chanda Committee recommended autonomy for the media along the lines of the BBC. Nothing was done to implement its decisions. During the Emergency, Indira Gandhi declared openly that AIR and Doordarshan are government media and will remain government media. Pramod Mahajan is saying pretty much the same thing in more circuitous language in 1999, while swearing himself black and blue in the face that he never interferes with Prasar Bharati. Only Ajit Kumar does, as we all know. L.K. Advani set up the Verghese Group immediately after the Emergency to lay down the guidelines for autonomy. It did, in no unequivocal terms. But although he instituted election broadcasts, which was a major step, Advani

enjoy star billing.

And lastly, the satellite invasion. Do you remember Indira Gandhi trying to find out if there was any way to black out the BBC and other international channels? Now they are trying, with the willing aid of the power-drunk babus of the information and broadcasting ministry by devious methods, to prevent any kind of competition, so that dull old DD can dodder on. Well, it won't work, as King Canute found when he asked the waves to roll back. Technology is moving so fast that soon TV will become as free to air as radio. And Mahajan and his ilk will feel sorry they didn't think of this earlier and India was left in the backwoods when the rest of the world moved on. •

The Best of the Firsts

Manju Kapur wins the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for her debut novel

After a string of rejections, came the award.

"I did feel vindicated, though I was never dejected with the initial rejections," says Manju Kapur, sitting pretty after bagging the Commonwealth Writer's Prize, 1999 for the Eurasia region for her debut novel, *Difficult Daughters*.

The award though welcome could not have come at a more difficult time, "what with my kids' examinations on, I am trying to help them with their studies and coping with innumerable telephone calls and requests for interviews". Having said that, she hastens to comfort us, hapless journoes who must get the job done. "I love the attention and my children are excited. Teaching is no problem."

It shouldn't be for this professor of modern literature at Miranda House. However, her first attempt to write a novel has taught her a lesson or two in perseverance, to take failure in her stride.

The first manuscript sent to Penguin was rejected. "They found it too academic — it was replete with footnotes and titled chapters." They also found it too lengthy, some 145,000 words. "That's not too long," Kapur shrugs. "They wanted me to get to the point quickly." So she cut it down to 110,000 words and sent it to Faber. They sold it to Penguin. And Penguin it was who published her work after numerous changes. The title she had originally chosen (*Partitions*) was not approved and several portions in the novel were altered.

"I guess they were embarrassed when I won the award," she laughs loudly. But all's well that ends well. "What ultimately matters is that my book has been

received well. The people have liked it, at least I think they have, and I have won an award. I have also accepted the changes made by the publishers — anything which makes the readers pick up the book is fine by me."

But is good sales all that matters? What about a writer's satisfaction? For someone whose self-confidence is low, good sales is the best reassurance she



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can get about her talent. "I write too slowly. I am a bad poet. And an even worse painter." Does bagging an award give her confidence to publish a book of poems? "No way. They are bad. I began writing seriously only because a friend of mine began writing and she coaxed me to do the same."

And also the fact that she comes from a writers' family — her sisters-in-law are writers, though Kapur is the first in the family to write in English.

Yet, Kapur is a greenhorn when it comes to knowing the tricks of the publishing trade. She has no agents, and, at the moment, is a bit bewildered by the attention showered on her and the numerous reading sessions she is getting invited to. As to how she will approach publishers for her forthcoming novels, Kapur doesn't seem to have a clue.



RAJINDER SARKAR

Kapur's first novel was born as an alternative to painting. It bored her, she says, though it is difficult to accept that looking at her works decorating the walls of her sprawling house.

"The entire rigmarole is too tedious. First, you have to choose the canvas, then the colours, you have to mix them — decide your subject ... it is so much more easier to write," points out Kapur.

Not that writing *Difficult Daughters* was cakewalk. The novel narrates the story of Virmati, an intelligent and ambitious woman torn between her love for a married professor and duty towards her family. The characters move on to Lahore where Virmati is groomed by her lover, who marries her much to the disgust and anger of his legitimate wife. Through Virmati, *Difficult Daughters* asserts a woman's struggle for right to

education and personal freedom.

Suggest a note of autobiography in her novel and she denies it vehemently. "There is nothing of my family background in the book. I have interviewed over 70 people who have studied and grown up in Lahore and scanned several papers. The characters are fictional but the emotion is authentic."

Kapur does concede that most women experience a dilemma, a conflict bet-

ween obligation and ambition — to that extent this novel is autobiographical.

The novel opens with a daughter mourning her mother's (Virmati) death. The rest of the novel follows in flashback and captures Virmati's life — how she falls in love, educates herself, enters the professor's house as his second wife, faces his family's wrath, gives birth to daughters and dies an unglorious death. To Kapur goes the credit for presenting this hackneyed theme in a novel style. And for this she got the Commonwealth Prize for best first novel.

Instituted in 1987, the prize is awarded in the two categories of best book and the best first published book. Kapur has got it for the latter and joins the ranks of Vikram Seth, Vikram Chandra and Githa Hariharan.

Which she finds hard to believe at times. It was at a function she was attending at the British Council where she heard of the award and rushed back home to share the news with her family.

Celebrations followed though little thought has been spared for the award money. "I believe I will get something like a 1,000 pounds ... I don't really know." Chances are that one will not find Kapur dining at a restaurant or celebrating with a crowd as she is totally off socialising. She rarely watches a movie or eats out and calls herself a neurotic writer.

Squeezing in time for her forthcoming novels is her immediate concern. "Preparing for my lectures, teaching the children, looking after the house — there is little time to do my own thing."

But she manages to steal a little time

"There is nothing of my family background in the book. I have interviewed over 70 people who have studied and grown up in Lahore and scanned several papers. The characters are fictional but the emotion is authentic"

for her novels. What are they about? She has little idea herself. "One of them is about a woman painter — the rest I have to work on. You see I rewrite so much as I can never make up my mind — and what comes out in the end is very different from what I had initially intended."

An indecisiveness characteristic of Kapur who cannot decide whether she likes the spotlight on her. •

Pallavi Ghosh/New Delhi

Cricket fatigue

The BCCI is responsible for the unhealthy state of the players

The cracks, appearing over the last few months, could virtually break the edifice. And if India fares badly in the World Cup, one of the principal reasons could be the health of the players.

Too much cricket has been a malady aired by several eminent cricketers, but the Board of Control for Cricket in India is too busy raking in sponsorship money to worry about injuries to players.

And, BCCI seems to believe that if Tom doesn't play, Dick or Harry could step in. This has been cleverly translated into a trial for several youngsters such as Sadagopan Ramesh, Amaya Khurasia and others who had been close to selection in one-dayers. They were tried out as others were "rested".

However, two players who were not being rested were the kingpins of the Indian squad: captain Mohammad Azharuddin and, arguably the world's best batsman, Sachin Tendulkar. Both were sidelined by stress-related injuries. The two had been playing too hard, too long.

Of course, the BCCI office-bearers will insist that the two have been incapacitated not by "overwork" but "in the normal course of playing". Most of these people, who have gone to a playing field only to shake hands, give expert opinions on the players' health and their capacity to combat fatigue.

Sachin Tendulkar: too much cricket



Azharuddin: ruled out

The writing is on the wall though. First, Javagal Srinath was sidelined for quite a while. Then it was Venkatesh Prasad. Even newcomer Ajit Agarkar was forced to go on leave.

However, it was Tendulkar's back problem that jolted the cricketing fraternity. His trip to England resulted in advice for treatment and rest. That's not all. The Harley Street specialist advocated a

change of bat. Obviously, cricket was not his forte, or else he would have realised that it is almost impossible for a player who has been playing with a heavy bat to suddenly switch to a lighter one. Other doctors and physiotherapists suggested the same, too. Also, there's the question of Sachin's bowling aggravating his back pain.

If these restrictions are, indeed, enforced, Tendulkar is likely to cut a sorry figure in England. The only way out now seems to be complete rest till the World Cup. Since all doctors agree that a set of exercises and prolonged rest are the key factors for recovery, Sachin should not be forced into playing the inconsequential Sharjah tournament which immediately follows the Pepsi series as his fitness is in question.

Finally, skipper Azharuddin has been sidelined with a physical problem. This is worrying because Azhar, the 36-year-old, is not getting any younger. The process of recovery for him will naturally take longer than Sachin who is ten years younger.

From the first match of the current triangular series, Azhar had felt a pain on his right shoulder. This continued to aggravate until he consulted a doctor. He was promptly ordered rest for at least eight days, thus ruling him out of at least two matches. And it could easily resurface if he chooses to carry on playing, if not in the Pepsi final, then at Sharjah.

The BCCI will have to take the blame squarely if any or all of these players perform below par in the World Cup. After all, the Board officials had decided on such hectic schedules without even informally interacting with the players.

One factor that has been consistently overlooked is the fitness level of the average Indian player. It is far below that of the Australians and South Africans. Even the Pakistanis, for that matter. To make matters worse, most Indians are not even athletic.

To equate them with cricketers of other countries — and thereby justify the heavy playing schedules — has been a mistake. And India may have to pay for it dearly in two months' time. •

Arijit Sen/Calcutta

The BCCI is to be blamed if any or all of these players perform below par in the World Cup.

After all, the Board had drawn up such hectic schedules without bothering about injuries to players

WEST BENGAL

A clear mandate

The GNLF romps home in the election to the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council



BY THE PEOPLE: voters wait for their turn during the DGHC election

Ultimately, it was the Gorkhaland issue which became the clincher. In the elections to the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC), Subash Ghisingh's GNLF has emerged as the clear winner. In the largely uneventful elections, held on 17 March, Ghisingh's party romped home with 26 out of the 28 elected seats to form the council for the third consecutive term. And this time, the GNLF was facing a concerted opposition from the eight-party alliance of Sanjukta Morcha.

It has become clear that Ghisingh will rule the hills for five more years. Locals feel that he has scored a brilliant hat-trick. While the Morcha had to be contented with two seats, the CPI(M) has drawn a blank. During the previous two elections in 1988 and 1993, the CPI(M) had won two seats.

This time, the DGHC election became a battle between two pro-Gorkhaland forces—the GNLF on one hand and the Sanjukta Morcha on the other, reinforcing the theory that pro-

Gorkhaland forces will dominate the hills. Though Gorkhaland was his brainchild, Ghisingh—for the last few years—had dropped the demand.

While campaigning, however, Ghisingh was forced to rake up the issue once again in order to deny the Morcha political mileage. After the split in the CPI(M) in the hills, leading to the formation of the Communist Party of Revolutionary Marxist (CPRM), the Gorkhaland demand acquired a new dimension. Newly-formed parties like the CPRM, the Bharatiya Gorkha Janashakti (BGJS) along with the oldest political party in the hills, the Akhil Bharatiya Gorkha League (ABGL), were found to be making an issue out of Gorkhaland. Their contention was that creation of a separate state was the only solution for the problems dogging the hills of Bengal.

Any demand for homeland has an emotional appeal and the new anti-GNLF-anti-CPI(M) front soon started to emerge as a force to reckon with. For the first time, Ghisingh smelt a

rat. In his scheme of things, the CPI(M) being opposed to the demand of Gorkhaland was never a threat to his existence. But the newly-formed Morcha, led by R.B. Rai, Dawa Lama, D.S. Bomjan and others could very well become his rivals.

And this realisation made Ghisingh revive the Gorkhaland demand. While campaigning in Kalimpong on 10 March, he



WINNER TAKES IT ALL: GNLF supremo Subash Ghisingh

went to the extent of telling people that 'khukris' had not been blunted. Analysts say that it was the Morcha's ascension which made the GNLF supremo remind people of the turbulent days of the mid-Eighties.

Ghisingh had a lot to worry this time. As long as the CPI(M) was his main political rival, Ghisingh had little to worry. In the recent past, however, Ghisingh had built up a good rapport with the CPI(M), especially with chief minister Jyoti Basu. Sanjukta Morcha made Ghisingh's closeness with the CM a political issue. They even pointed towards an "unholy alliance" between CPI(M) and GNLF. Infighting was another worry for the GNLF supremo. But in end, as results show, Ghisingh had the last laugh.

Though the GNLF has retained power, there is serious erosion in its vote bank. From 85 in 1988, the percentage of votes in favour of GNLF candidates came down to around 65 per cent in 1993, and to 53 this time. In as many as 11 constituencies, GNLF candidates got less than 50 per cent votes.

Rudra Kumar Pradhan, president of GNLF's Darjeeling unit and DGHC executive councillor for the last two terms, got a mere 25 per cent of the valid votes to win his Singmari-Takvur valley constituency. In contrast, the party's Kalimpong unit president C.K. Pradhan got the highest percentage of votes (71.43). Ghisingh got 70.21 per cent. In 1993, the GNLF won in seven seats unopposed while this time it has won only one seat unopposed.

A number of rebel GNLF candidates were in the fray and surprisingly all had the blessings of Ghisingh. As a result, sitting GNLF councillors like Hema Lama and Bhakta Jaiu lost the election. But the greatest debacle was the defeat of DGHC vice-chairman Keshav Chandra Lama.

The Sanjukta Morcha has had its problems too. Being a front of eight different parties, they also had rebel candidates. And despite being one of the major constituents of the Morcha, the CPRM failed to win a single seat. It will be the two ABGL candidates who will keep the Morcha flag flying in the new council. In all, Morcha was able to corner 27 per cent of the votes.

The mandate is clear: if Gorkhaland is the issue, the hills would still like Ghisingh to be their leader. •

Iva Guha/Siliguri

MADHYA PRADESH

A matter of facts

How reliable are the state's tiger census data?

The tiger census conducted by the authorities in Madhya Pradesh has kicked up a row. The census report of the state forest department released last year had observed that the number of tigers in MP had gone up to 927. The figure was 912 in 1993. But the London-based Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) has branded the census report as 'dubious'.

"Madhya Pradesh is a sad reflection of the crisis facing the tiger across the world," says Dave Currey, author of the EIA report. Debbie Banks, co-author, has questioned the "authenticity" of the 1997 census. The country's tiger census in 1997 became controversial as non-governmental organisations raised questions about the authenticity of the pug-mark method employed in the census. Widespread incidents of poaching and the fear of tiger's extinction by the turn of the century had made the census data crucial.

Though forest officials and the NGOs have differing perceptions over the census methodology and the number of tigers killed each year, they agree on one point: that tigers are being poached and that the number of poaching incidents detected is merely the "tip of the iceberg".

The 1997 census figures, released in 1998 by the state forest department, did show that the number of tigers had gone up. But further analysis showed that there was an alarming fall in

Lighting up lives

Calcutta's Park Hotel promotes matchsticks made without child labour

Making matchboxes is almost synonymous with one of the greatest blights of modern India: child labour. No longer. A unique effort should soon free children from this hazardous job. The Park chain of hotels, along with Fair Trade of Germany and Sashia, an NGO and development marketing organisation, have teamed up to improve the condition of workers in the matchbox industry.

"The Park Hotel believes that it is its mission to be a good corporate citizen and serve the community that sustains it," said Priya Paul, president, The Park Hotels. The hotel is the first corporate house and hotel in India to introduce matchboxes manufactured in Tamil Nadu's Sivakashi without involving child labour. The project is spearheaded jointly by Sashia and Fair Trade. "We are proud to be the first hotel to promote Fair Trade and we hope to encourage other companies," said Paul.

The story goes back to March 1998. Martin Kunz, project manager of Germany's Fair Trade Association, had come down to Sivakashi. He wanted to have a first-hand



DWINDLING NUMBERS: inside a national Park

the number staying in the national parks. In 1993, the number of tigers in national parks and sanctuaries was 246, which came down to 229 in 1997.

Interestingly, the census figures revealed that the tiger population increased in general forest areas — from 458 in 1993 to 472 in 1997. But the EIA report, which focuses on Madhya Pradesh, has now put a big question mark on the census figures.

"The tiger population statistics has become so dubious that the director of Project Tiger decided that he will not officially accept the 1997 figures," says Currey. "The story of Madhya Pradesh is one of broken promises, good ideas destroyed, good staff removed, tiger habitat destroyed and tigers and their prey poached."

The EIA report has pointed at several collateral factors

which have a bearing on the tiger population. These include, among other things, illegal fishing, mining and felling of trees inside national parks. The report observes: "...even before the field work had been completed (of the 1997 tiger census), there were reports that orders had percolated down the ranks to ensure that over 1,000 tigers would be counted in Madhya Pradesh to show an increase from 1993 census figure of 912 tigers."

"Dr Rajesh Gopal, director of Kanha National Park," the report alleges, "was given the dubious honour of analysing the state's census data consisting of pug-mark casts taken from tiger footprints and tracings. Though the estimates claimed a population of 927 tigers, only 409 tracings were made available for analysis."

The EIA report goes on to say: "Though he was not able to account for 55 per cent of the tigers, Dr Gopal forwarded the total to the chief wildlife warden but added his concern over the failure of some of the officials to provide any evidence of their tigers." He stressed that "in the absence of pug-mark tracings from many circles, the tabulation being sent from his end amounts to a compilation only."

The chief wildlife warden of Madhya Pradesh, P.K. Mishra, denies the charges. "MP is the only state which completed the work systematically and meticulously. The EIA report reveals that the British colonial mentality has still not gone." According to Mishra, all the 927 pug-mark, on which the census report is based, were available.

Speaking to SUNDAY, Mishra said that MP was the only state to adopt an yearwise census. Some state wildlife officials felt that agencies like the EIA were the mouthpiece of NGOs and wildlife activists who wanted to perpetuate their hold over matters concerning the wildlife. •

Deshdeep Saxena/Bhopal

idea of the living and working conditions of workers engaged in the match factories. "Fair Trade creates opportunities for disadvantaged workers by granting assistance directly to producers and by providing information and education," pointed out Kunz.

After calculating the sustenance needed by a worker's family in Sivakashi, a local NGO called ASSEFA, which owns a match-making unit, was roped in. Under the

A DIFFERENT MATCH: Priya Paul (left) launches child-labour-free matchboxes in Calcutta



arrangement, the adult workers got a wage increase which was equivalent to what two full-time earners per family earned in order to provide food, shelter, clothing, education and medical needs.

Fair Trade is an international partnership among producers, traders and consumers. The organisation tries to remove disadvantages suffered by producers, increase access to markets and promote the sustainable development process. Fair Trade's activities include creating opportunities so that small-scale producers can improve their living and working conditions.

"We are trying to make sure the adult workers in Sivakashi get paid their due which is 50 per cent more than what they get now. We also monitor the activities of the children so that they go to school and are not sent back to work again," said Kunz. Fair Trade's mission is to promote equity, environmental protection and economic security through trade, awareness and campaign. One of its key principles is to protect and promote human rights, particularly those of women, children and indigenous people.

The Park has found out that this project made good commercial sense and that sound corporate practices need not necessarily be charity-driven. In this case, the matchboxes are much better as they are of export quality.

And they also light up people's lives. •

Pankaj Adhikari/Calcutta

That's entertainment

The Oscar ceremony was captivating

The Oscars, the last of the millennium, have come and gone. At four hours and some, the function was overlong, as usual, but no one was complaining: this has been said before, but remains valid everytime, that for sheer beautifully-synchronised, feel-good, starry spectacle, there's nothing quite like the annual Academy Awards.

Emcee Whoopi Goldberg proved herself to be a quick-change artist, swanning happily down the large stage in several costumes from nominated films: her Elizabeth complete with white mask was a riot. The acceptance speeches were satisfactorily schmaltzy — Roberto Benigni who won big for his tragi-comic masterpiece *Life is Beautiful* lost all his accented English as he claimed not one but three of the coveted statuettes (only Sophia Loren, who was at hand, understood completely as he warbled away about making love to people in Jupiter); and instead of words, we got a teary flood from best actress Gwyneth Paltrow (hoo-hoo, she went, I don't really deserve this,



WAITING IN THE WINGS: Shekhar Kapur at the awards ceremony

and at this the camera cut away cleverly to Meryl Streep who presumably deserved it.)

India's great White Hope Shekhar Kapur must have felt like a decorative appendage, as he saw his *Elizabeth* get a minor award. But the fact remains that he was there, in the pulsating Dorothy Chandler auditorium. As a beginning it wasn't so bad. Remember, how long Spielberg had to wait for his first.

Comparisons are usually odious, and in this instance, a little unfair, but if you see the home-grown attempts at film awards, they appear tacky, and ill-rehearsed. Of the three cine awards, Filmfare, Screen and the latest entrant, Zee, the latter appears the most democratic because it's based on viewers' choice and they've all shown some improvement in packaging and presenting. But they've all got a long way to go to become seamless, attractive entertainment. •

BIHAR

State of inertia

Bihar continues to reel under bandhs

Life in Bihar continues to be out of gear. If the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) called for a Bihar *bandh* as soon as President's Rule was imposed in the state, the Opposition parties, the BJP-Samata Party combine, could not lag far behind. So, after 35 persons were butchered on 18 March at Senari village in Jehanabad district, the BJP-Samata Party combine called for a *bandh* on 23 March, protesting against the killings.

The latest Bihar *bandh* passed off peacefully, with about 2,000 arrests made all over the state as a preventive measure. Most shops and business establishments remained closed in Patna, though some vehicles continued to ply on the main thoroughfares. State government offices remained open and attendance was normal. Educational establishments, however, remained closed throughout the state.

Though no untoward incident was reported from anywhere, the *bandh* supporters, in their bid to make it a grand success, disrupted movement of trains, especially on the Patna-Gaya section. Director-general of police T.P. Sinha later said that nearly 1,724 were taken into custody, of which around 1,000 were picked up from the state capital itself.

Several state-level leaders of both the BJP and the Samata Party were also arrested in Patna. The Patna administration, led by district magistrate Amit Khare and senior superintendent of police Kumar Rajesh Chandra, took the leader of the Opposition in Bihar Assembly, Sushil Kumar Modi, the BJP state president, Nand Kishore Yadav, the Samata Party state president Raghunath Jha and the Nalanda Assembly segment MLA Shrawan Kumar of the Samata Party in custody from the Dak Bungalow crossing in Patna. The Patna parliamentary constituency representative, C.P. Thakur of the BJP, was arrested while he sat on a *dharna*.

Meanwhile, even as the RJD national president Laloo Prasad Yadav described the *bandh* as a "super-flop" show, the BJP-Samata Party combine accused the state administration of resorting to terror tactics to dissuade political activists.

Meanwhile, even as one *bandh* after the other was making life all the more difficult for the common people, the Ranvir Sena, the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC), the People's War Group (PWG) and the CPI(ML) were preparing themselves for a showdown.

Even in the middle of the *bandh* on 23 March, the CPI(M) went ahead with its rally at the historic Gandhi Maidan in Patna. Though the attendance was thin, CPI(M) general secretary Harkishan Singh Surjeet defended the state government.

Meanwhile, the two-member Congress team comprising former Lok Sabha Speaker Shivraj Patil and Meira Kumar had to remain in Patna. They were "advised" by the state government to desist from visiting Senari village. It is believed that the people of Senari continued to hold the Congress guilty of opposing President's Rule in Bihar.

More Bihar *bandhs* cannot be ruled out in future. Especially when the Naxal outfits and the Ranvir Sena have vowed to step up the violence. •

Naved Zahir/Patna



ARIES

(21 March-20 April)

A business boom could have you extra busy, but also glad to be fully engaged in something really worthwhile. Be on your toes and don't think too much about those who want to work according to plan. It is a time to improvise and take things as they come. There will be an occasion to do some celebrating.

TAURUS

(21 April-20 May)

You need to settle down to get your home and affairs in order. Do not overlook details. You need to adopt a more thorough approach. The health of a parent may be worrying you. Put yourself out to help. It is probably a week of giving in your best and not worrying about the results.

GEMINI

(21 May-20 June)

Be careful as to how you deal with people. Your life can suddenly take on a new meaning. If your boss is not treating you fairly, try to find out the reason. Patience is needed. You may find it hard to please everyone. It is important that you keep the wheels turning.

CANCER

(21 June-20 July)

It is hard to get people to understand what you are all about, so if you have a savvy partner, get him or her to speak on your behalf. You may be in love and don't intend to hide the fact. A certain development can bring you and your partner much closer.

LEO

(21 July-20 August)

It seems that some valuable news is waiting to be passed on. Expansion seems to be the answer to a lot of problems. Be positive in all you do. Your air of confidence can inspire others to make the efforts that are needed. A social recognition can come your way.

LIBRA

(21 September-20 October)

Look after your reputation, appearance and your standing in the community, especially through your work. A small business may be coming out of its formal start and beginning to show signs of development. Home entertainment can be fun. New people may come into your group of friends.

SAGITTARIUS

(21 November-20 December)

It could be wise to do some research into a health issue that does not want to clear up. People may stoop to mean or dishonest actions in order to get their own way. Do not be averse to making your own case. If you can get to the bottom of things, you can have them solved.

CAPRICORN

(21 December-20 January)

It is an excellent time to catch up with your friends and relatives. Go out for a short holiday. The results of a legal decision makes life a lot more easy-going. It is an excellent time to do or arrange for home improvements. You may be feeling either romantic or sentimental.

AQUARIUS

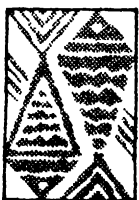
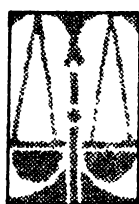
(21 January-20 February)

You will be looking forward to a quiet spell and probably wishing there were something more interesting to do. A matter close to your heart may take up a lot of your time. Humanitarian interests can be much more important than grubbing for a living.

PISCES

(21 February-20 March)

A special talent can be promoted. There are opportunities for you to grasp. Make it much easier by getting together with like-minded people in a social atmosphere. Your great ideas about something might appeal to people concerned. You will be happy to be on the move.



VIRGO

(21 August-20 September)

Kee your affairs to yourself. If you have to discuss, do so only with someone you can trust, possibly someone with family connections or recommended by a parent. A deal can be settled. Social contacts may let you down. Take a close interest in domestic matters.

SCORPIO

(21 October-20 November)

Try clearing the decks and tidying up. Now is the time to keep a check on your expenses. Extra responsibilities can come your way and you will need the resources to cope up. Be practical and weigh things before committing yourself. Bring outstanding affairs to a close.

Out of retirement

■ What do retired bureaucrats do? Many write memoirs or become freelance journalists. Better still, some become consultants with hefty pay packages.

Take the instance of former Cabinet secretary S. Rajagopal. Though he has held a number of "general" positions including that of chief secretary Maharashtra, he spent a substantial chunk of his career in the energy



S. Rajagopal: power bureaucrat

sector — in the department of atomic energy and then as power secretary.

As Rajagopal had developed an expertise in the working of the power sector, it was not surprising that he was roped in as a consultant to the Enron group headquartered at Houston, USA.

But Rajagopal's services are evidently in greater demand. Another American multinational corporation, Cogentrix, which is setting up a power plant at Mangalore, has decided to seek the assistance of this retired bureaucrat.

HEARD AT THE AICC

Jairam Ramesh may not have been elevated but his shoes certainly have been.

A FELLOW CONGRESSMAN ON RAMESH'S PLATFORM HEELS

Tangled in coils

■ What's the difference between the London Metal Exchange (LME) and the London Metal Bulletin (LMB)?

Well, the first is the biggest commodities board in the world, which facilitates international trade in various metals and provides data on benchmark rates or "actual" prices at which transactions take place.

The second is a trade journal which, among other things, provides "indicative" prices of various metals and metal products prevailing at a particular time.

The difference between LME and LMB has become one more bone of contention in the ongoing tussle between two sections of the



J.J. Irani: supporting the government

steel industry: one in favour of and another opposed to the government's decision to impose a floor price on the import of steel items, particularly hot-rolled (HR) coils.

In the third week of March, representatives of the steel majors held a press conference to justify the government's decision on the ground that cheap

imports had crippled the working of the industry.

At the briefing, industry bigwigs including SAIL chairman Arvind Pande and Tata Steel chief executive J.J. Irani argued in favour of using "LME" prices as the basis for fixing the floor price. What they meant were prices published in the LMB, but someone some-

where had obviously not briefed them properly.

A few days later, another press conference was called by the rival, Cold Rolled Steel Manufacturers' Association of India (CORSMA), whose chairman S.P. Jain blasted the arguments forwarded by Pande, Irani and company. The CORSMA representative contended that the prices of HR coils contained in the LMB were only "indicative" and that actual selling prices were much lower since hefty discounts were invariably given to bulk purchasers.

The government will have to authenticate what the actual international price of HR coils have been in the recent past. Only then will the confusion be cleared about whether or not the floor price fixed by the commerce ministry in December was significantly higher than the actual world market prices of HR coils at that time.

Till then, the government would continue to face flak from the Opposition for not being open or even-handed in tackling this issue. •

CHECK-LIST

What the World Bank wants India to do: J. Stiglitz's prescription

■ **Where does India stand:** India has managed the fallout of the East Asian crisis creditably but can't afford to let its guard down, especially in regulating financial institutions.

■ **What should not be done:** The East Asian economies had high growth rates but almost no social security nets. India must avoid that trap.

■ **What should be done:** Long-term finance investment should be encouraged.

■ **What might go wrong:** Slowdown in industry was disturbing and debilitating, but not a cause for concern yet.

A rule is a rule

■ Whatever his critics may say about him, there is a lot about L.K. Advani which is simply endearing.



L.K. Advani: simply endearing

The investiture ceremony was a glittering affair in Rashtrapati Bhavan. Several ministers attended, including the home minister and his wife. In attendance was the usual security rigmarole involving frisking, metal detectors, etc.

As L.K. Advani and wife Kamla were walking through, they forgot that they should go through the metal detector. A policewoman stopped Mrs Advani first, and then the minister. The home minister of India and his wife were called back frisked and made to walk through the metal detector frame. They did so quietly, without complaining. That's grace for you.

Home truth

■ The Delhi unit of the BJP however, is angry with the home minister.

They took out a procession and were lathi-charged by the Delhi government. They believed they had a right to complain — former minister Jagdish Mukhi got his head bashed in and several MLAs were hurt. So they decided that the best person to complain to against the behaviour of the chief minister of a Congress(I) govern-

HEARD IN CHENNAI

Jayalalitha's slogan is 'If you can't beat them at the polls, beat them with your shoes'.

A JOURNALIST

ment was the home minister of India.

They waited and waited. They hadn't got an appointment till 24 hours after the incident. They might have got one later, but by then they were past caring.

A bureaucrat's story

■ Whatever happened to the IAS officer from Maharashtra and dapper secretary general of the

Rajya Sabha, Srinivasarao Sohoni, who had gone to court demanding his reinstatement in the post?

Sohoni's career was studded with glamour. A 1971 batch officer, he was posted as secretary to the governor when S.D. Sharma became Maharashtra governor in 1984 and Sohoni was the municipal commissioner of Thane. Later, Sharma was made vice-president with every prospect of becoming President of India. Sohoni continued as additional-

secretary to the vice-president. As the vice-president is also the chairman of the Rajya Sabha, Sohoni acquired great expertise in the job.

In 1992, when it was clear that Sharma was becoming President of India, a few months before he filed his nomination, Sohoni resigned from the IAS and applied for a job in the Rajya Sabha secretariat. Now he was working as secretary to the President of India and additional secretary general in the Rajya Sabha. He would spend half the day in Parliament and half the day in Rashtrapati Bhavan.

The government appointed V.S. Rama Devi as secretary-general of the Rajya Sabha but she quit the post when she was appointed governor of Himachal Pradesh in 1997. There was no one to handle the work of secretary-general of the Rajya Sabha, and Sohoni took on the mantle and was deemed to be a full secretary.

The government had other ideas. R.C. Tripathi, a straightforward and plainspeaking bureaucrat, as secretary-general. So Sohoni was reverted to being additional-secretary. He went to court.

The court said the appointment was wrong. The Rajya Sabha appealed against the order. By now Sohoni had enough and he quit.

The real story, however, is that Sohoni made a mistake. In his plea to court, he argued that he was the senior-most therefore must be given his due. He told the court he had seniority of 27 years. However, he took advantage of the fact that premature retirement gets you a five year advantage in pension. It came to light later that he had continued drawing his salary from the Rajya Sabha as well as his pension from the IAS.

Now he is living a happy retired life in Maharashtra. •

CHECK-LIST

Inside the Congress: who wants to topple the government — and who doesn't

■ **Karnal Nath:** (See elsewhere.) The source of assorted stories to the effect that the government is about to fall.

■ **P.A. Sangma:** Used to be a moderate but has now come around to the view that the BJP cannot be allowed to continue.

■ **R.K. Dhawan:** Would like to topple them immediately.

■ **Manmohan Singh:** Too mild-mannered to advocate a coup. But is getting increasingly tired of the BJP and the way it is running the country.

■ **Madhavrao Solanki:** A former moderate, he has now come around to the view that the Congress should pull the plug on this government.

■ **Rajesh Pilot:** Advocates an aggressive line against the BJP which would lead, inevitably, to the collapse of this government.

■ **Tariq Anwar:** Sees no harm in forming a government in this Lok Sabha with the support of Laloo Yadav.

■ **Sharan Pawar:** Still has to make up his mind which side he's on. But then, this is a pretty constant problem with him.

Poor Pawar!

■ He was never known for his charm. But Sharad Pawar is now on a charm offensive. Perturbed by stories to the effect that Sonia is livid about his non-performance as Leader of the Opposition, Pawar has launched a PR drive to indicate that a) all is well between him and 10 Janpath and b) he is still a national leader of substance.

To this end, assorted Pawar minions have been



Sharad Pawar: losing ground

calling up journalists and planting stories to the effect that Pawar is a Sonia favourite. The great man himself has taken to hosting media dinners and recently took a party of journalists to Baramati, his constituency in Maharashtra.

Sadly, the chances of this offensive succeeding are severely limited. For one, everybody who goes to 10 Janpath is left in no doubt about the lady's feelings for Pawar. And for another, the worst way to prove that you're a national leader is to take hacks to your constituency. It tends to confirm the suspicion that you've gone from being putative Prime Minister of India to Prime Minister of Baramati.

HEARD AT THE AICC

Manmohan Singh is leader of the party in the Rajya Sabha, Sharad Pawar is leader in the Lok Sabha. And Kamal Nath is leader in The Times of India.

A 10 JANPATH FUNCTIONARY

Lies after lies

■ Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat takes the cake.

Remember how he said there was no question of his ever having threatened Vice Admiral (now CNS) Sushil Kumar with court martial and sundry other punishments, because he wasn't in town on 27 November last year, the day this is supposed to have happened?

Bhagwat's contention was he was in Dhaka (where he had a dust up with British Airways over excess baggage) on 27 November 1998. Because he was out of town he did not/could not have phoned and threatened Vice Admiral Sushil Kumar with dire consequences if he appealed to the defence mini-



Vishnu Bhagwat: time to stop

stry for justice.

Apparently, the admiral has been economical with the truth. Because he'd already returned to Delhi on

27 November. He did make a call to Sushil Kumar at Cochin at about 5.00 PM that day.

So how was he so brazen in denying this charge? Because he thought it would never come out. Some people will stop at nothing.

Security matters

■ Has the government realised that the Special Protection Group (SPG) security cover on Congress president Sonia Gandhi ends in November this year? If so what are they going to do about it?

By an Act of Parliament, SPG cover was permitted for ten years for Prime Ministers and their families and the period of being out of power was included in this.

Sonia's ten years are up in November and V.P. Singh's ten years end in 2000. Singh, of course, has been saying that he has never sought SPG protection in the first place and will be happy it is ending. But there is a real security threat to Sonia Gandhi (from terrorists as well as Congressmen) and the government will have to push legislation in Parliament extending this for another ten years.

What is causing concern is how some members of the government are muttering that it isn't fair. The government, a few days ago, evicted the widow of the former President of India, Chitra Zail Singh's wife from the government house she had been occupying. And the widow of Rajiv Gandhi gets what she wants, including car, house and security.

But what can you do? The BJP will come for a lot of criticism if it tries to play politics with the security of leaders, no matter how necessary a rationalisation might be.

CHECK-LIST

Now that Jayalalitha is addressing a seminar on inner-party democracy, here are some other unlikely seminarists

■ **The Delhi Police:** How to maintain law and order

■ **Charles Sobhraj:** Social work

■ **L.K. Advani:** The importance of standing up for friends

■ **Uma Bhatti:** The wit and wisdom of Murl Manohar Joshi

■ **M. Karunanidhi:** The virtues of monogamy

■ **Navin Pattnaik:** How to find girlfriends

■ **Mohan Guruswamy:** How to win friends and influence people

PICK

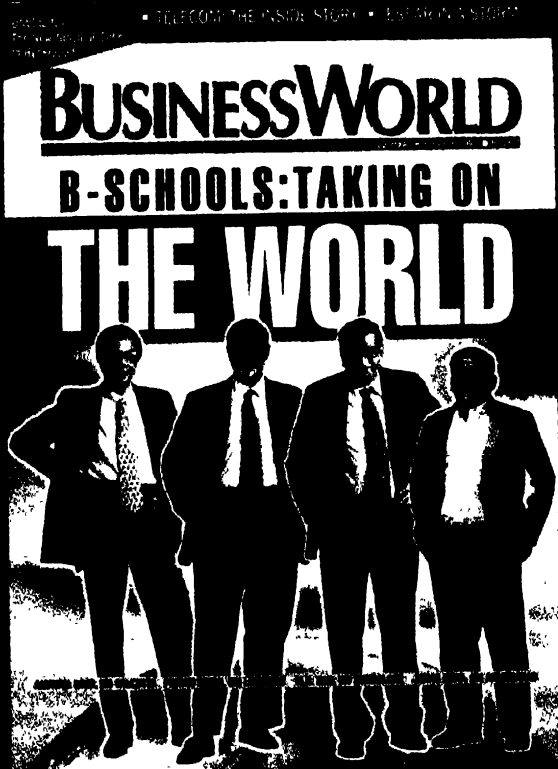
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fabulous
PRIZE**

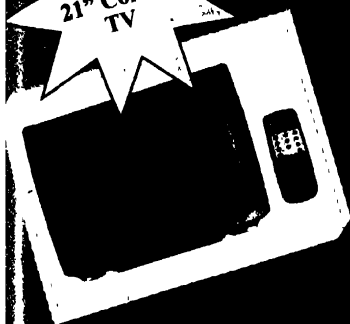
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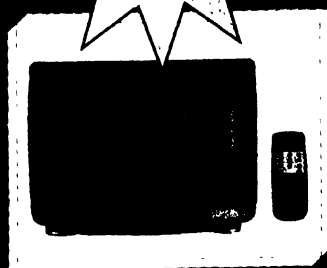
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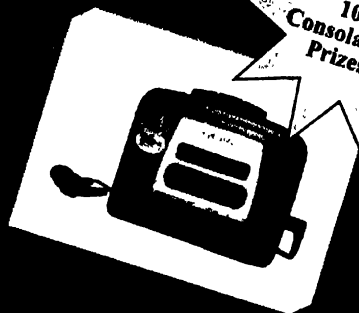
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SUNDAY



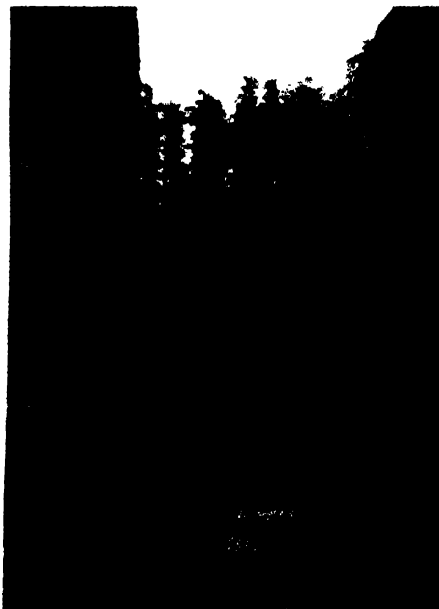
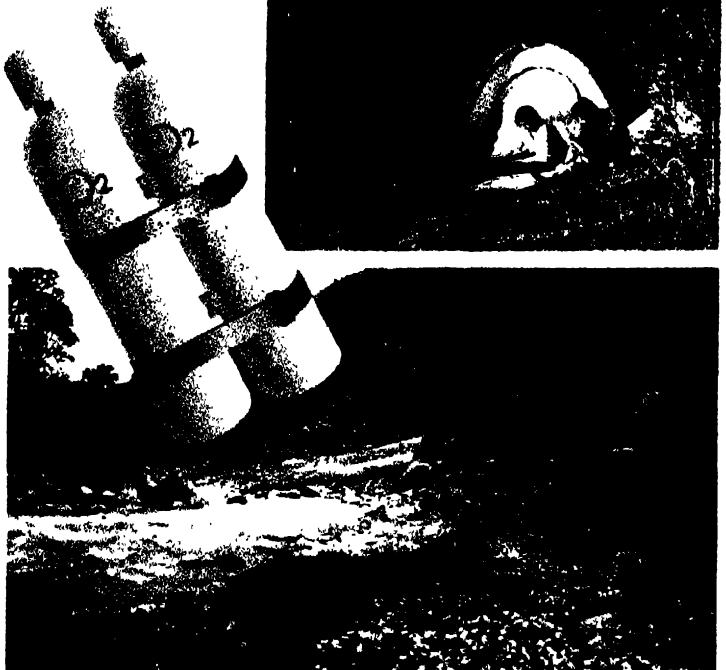
GEORGE FERNANDES
scripts the final chapter of the
VISHNU BHAGWAT
sacking saga

IN
defence
OF THE
REALM



A definitive guide to who was right and who was wrong

If you're dying for a breath
of rare oxygen, Pithoragarh,
Chaukori, Sitalakhet, Mukteshwar,
Binsar, Champawat or Kausani
are where a deep breath
will make you come
alive again!



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UTTAR PRADESH
The essence of India

Ref: H/son-DY&R/Del/UP/17498/R

Letters.....	3
Sight and Sound.....	6
Seen.....	7
Spotlight.....	40
News.....	59
Sunday Week.....	63
Business Diary.....	64
Random Notes.....	65
Delhi Diary.....	66



COVER STORY 12

In defence of the realm

George Fernandes scripts the final chapter of the Vishnu Bhagwat sacking saga. A definitive guide to who was right and who was wrong

SPECIAL REPORT 24

Goan holiday

A turning point for the Bharatiya Janata Party



BUSINESS

Hanging by a thread

The bulk import of the Chinese variety may wipe out the domestic silk industry 28

COLUMNS

MANI-TALK
Mani Shankar Aiyar..... 8

POWER PLAY
Rajiv Shukla..... 11

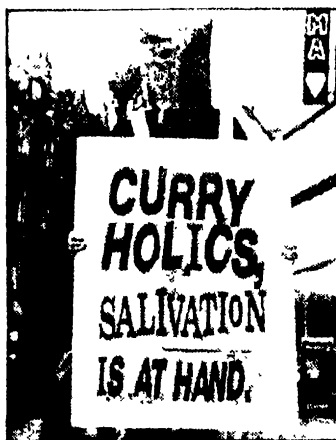
THE SOUTH BLOCK
Inder Malhotra..... 27

Cover transparencies: Rupinder Sharma

BOOK EXTRACT 32

Carrying curry to Southall

Shrabani Basu's book describes how the curry craze has taken Britain by storm. An extract





FM channel

Yashwant Sinha's opinions on the Budget, the government and his friends and enemies made an interesting reading (*Man of the month*, 28 March—3 April).

While P. Chidambaram's Budget in the past had kept a

tight rein on government expenditure, this seems to hold true of Yashwant Sinha's Budget too. The cornerstone of Yashwant's Budget seems to be downsizing and it is this that the whole Budget seems to be hinged on.

Abolishing the post of four secretaries and creating regulatory authorities so that the need for large corporations is eliminated are just some of the downsizing methods he has employed. The Expenditure Reforms Commission will now ensure that the government is careful about what and how much it does by way of spending. Every finance minister makes his own unique Budget and so we have to wait and watch what Yashwant Sinha's Budget does for the Indian economy.

Rajat Dasgupta, Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh)

■Yashwant Sinha seems to have made a grievous error of judgement when he chose Mohan Guruswamy to be his adviser. Just because he was sacked gives him no right to publicly criticize and levy false charges against Sinha.

To go around saying that Yashwant Sinha was being pressurised to clear a Hinduja-backed power project creates a wrong image for the country, especially at a time when MNCs are trying desperately to find a foothold here. It will give out wrong signals that the finance ministry has ulterior motives and is biased which will be an immediate turn-off for the MNCs. His willingness to work long hours so as not to leave any pending files overnight seems to be rather out of place in the Indian ministry where living the good life seems to be the norm.

Ipekita Nandy, Calcutta (West Bengal)

Yashwant Sinha: caught in a bind

People's power

The 30-year-old dispute over the 55-foot long road in Bangalore's busy Jayanagar area shows how potent communal feelings are (*Where there is a will*, 7—13 March). The skillful handling of the problem by the Bangalore police reflects that with tolerance and with human consideration, any problem can be solved for the benefit of not only one particular group or community but for all the people concerned.

S. Halan, Tamil Nadu

Bewildering facts

In the story *The oddballs* (14—20 March), Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, Union minister of state, had been described as the Muslim youngster within the RSS fold. One may recall that sometime back SUNDAY had revealed that Naqvi had renounced Islam and was converted to Hinduism by Ashok Singhal. If that was true, why are you describing him as Muslim now?

Sharif Alavi, Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh)

True colours

Having declared that Rabri Devi had no moral right to rule in the wake of Dalit massacre in Jehanabad, Sonia Gandhi's volte face over President's Rule in Bihar speaks volumes for her political opportunism (*First strike*, 7—13 March). After the Panchmari declaration, the general feeling was that Sonia Gandhi was more interested in reviving the Congress than unseating the Vajpayee government and capturing power at the Centre. But the decision on the Bihar issue has shown clearly that

the lady of Janpath is not different from other power-hungry Congress leaders and is becoming desperate to grab the power at the Centre.

Although Sonia keeps say-



Sonia Gandhi: desperation is showing

ing that her party won't topple the BJP-led government and would rather wait for it to fall on its own, the Congress' true colours are exposed after the party's decision on the Bihar issue.

Amarnath Kamat, Bombay (Maharashtra)

Need for reform

This refers to the story *Sitting on files* (21—27 March). Union ministers who show sheer unconcern for the clearance of files in their respective departments are creating problems for the Vajpayee government. And this has brought to the fore the urgent need for reforms on two fronts—doing away with short-cut procedures to avoid delay and to improve efficiency and cut expenditure.

A. Jacob Sahayam, Vellore (Tamil Nadu)

Flawed appreciation

This refers to the story *Guruswamy primer* (21—27 March). Strangely enough, the columnist hasn't appreciated the central



government's efforts to bail out the indigenous steel industry which is in the red for almost a year. On the contrary, the writer has drawn conclusions based solely on the allegations of Guruswamy.

S.S. Sakseena, New Delhi

Question of concessions

The columnist has rightly pointed out that the Dalai Lama's optimism on Tibet is perhaps wishful thinking (*Picture imperfect*, 21—27 March). Chinese history shows that it considers all its territories its own. And that explains the Chinese claim on some Indian territories which it has been occupying illegally.

It is doubtful whether Chinese authority would give any concessions on the Tibet issue.

V. Sagar, Delhi

Medicine menace

It is just through publicity many medicines grab our attention (*Pill power*, 21—27 March). Strangely enough, the rich executives and the so-called intelligentia are being duped by the quacks who prescribe quick remedies, though in many cases, the remedy becomes worse than the malady. Unless some of these cheats are taken to the consumer forum, the menace will assume alarming proportions.

U.S. Iyer, Bangalore (Karnataka)

Making of a Saint

This refers to the story *On the fast track* (21—27 March). I am optimistic about Mother Teresa's prospects of canonisation and



Mother Teresa: sainthood beckons

feel that the Vatican will canonise Mother in the millennial year.

Mother is a shining example of selfless service. The admirers of Mother Teresa have enough patience to wait for her Canonisation — may be for 600 years as in the case of Joan of Arc or 40 years as in the case of Maximilian Kolbe. Let there be no short-cuts or any bending of rules. Let the Sacred Congregation of Saint Makers follow their own rules and satisfy themselves.

Mother's life is like an open book and hers is an ideal case for sainthood

Onkar Chopra, New Delhi

CRY-ing out

All of us in CRY read with special interest the piece *Crying to be heard* (21—27 February).

Indeed, print media is a potent weapon in supporting the weakest of the weak — over a 100 million underprivileged children — whom

CRY has been working to help since its inception in 1979.

Much of what the writer had stated gave us immense strength and encouragement. However, there were also areas which were not noticed or were misunderstood. Regrettably, observations recorded as a consequence would ultimately be detrimental to the cause of our underprivileged children, which is far more important than CRY's misrepresented image.

In the matter of statistics, starting from Rs 50, CRY, with the help of its over a lakh supporters and its own efforts, had disbursed Rs 21.3 crore to its project partners. Disbursals during the financial year ending 31 March 1999 are expected to reach Rs 9 crore and budgeted for the financial year 1999-2000 are Rs 13.5 crore.

Reference to affluent children may have confused the readers. CRY has a youth wing which among its many other functions, promotes interaction between underprivileged and privileged children in areas where they can both learn from each other. Painting competition was a part of this programme.

Donations from corporate sector account for 35% of CRY's resources. That very week Citibank had launched a CRY credit card in aid of CRY and the bank's presence was to raise funds for children.

Finally, boards displaying information and photographs on CRY's programmes and plenty of take-away information literature were available and CRY's staff wearing distinctive badges was in attendance.

Bondana Dutta, regional manager, CRY (North), New Delhi

Our correspondent replies:
I wrote what I saw and heard. I stand by my story.

SEPARATED AT BIRTH?

PRIZE RS 200 FOR CONTRIBUTIONS



Kaustav Ghosh
Footballer



Sonu Nigam
Singer

Contributed by Bhareti Banerjee, Calcutta (West Bengal)

MILESTONES

APPOINTED: Gegong Apang, former Arunachal Pradesh chief minister, as a working president of the Asian Committee for Peace, Solidarity and Human Rights.

ELECTED: Anand Rathi, chairman of Anand Rathi Securities Pvt. Ltd, as president of the Bombay Stock Exchange for 1999-2000.

LAUNCHED: the Persons of Indian Origin card by the government to facilitate visa-free entry of ethnic Indians holding foreign citizenship.

AWARDED: to Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh Prime Minister, the UNESCO peace prize for



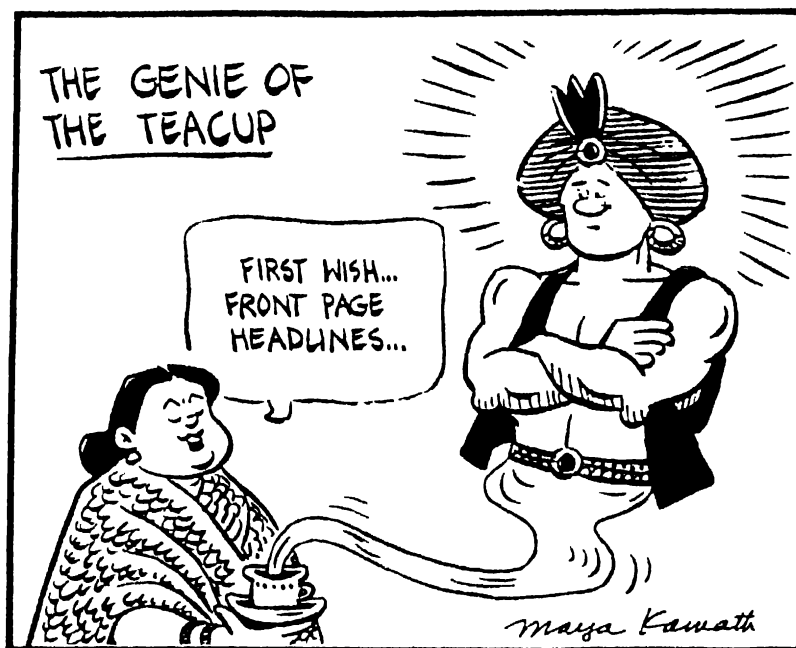
resolving the Chakma refugee crisis. In December 1997, she had signed the peace treaty with tribal leaders ending a 22-year insurgency.

RESIGNED: K.A.P. Singh, commercial director of Steel Authority of India Ltd. He joins L.N. Mittal's Mexico Steel Works.

RESIGNED: Devendra Singh Bhola, Uttar Pradesh minister of state for welfare, accusing chief minister Kalyan Singh of being corrupt, partisan and influenced by bureaucrats.

DIED: Madurantakam Rajaram, 69, Telugu litterateur and Sahitya Akademi Award winner; at Tirupati on 1 April.

SIGHT & SOUND



MAYA KAMATH, THE ASIAN AGE

■ No country, howsoever powerful or resourceful it may be, can be allowed to act as the policeman of the world.

ATUL BEHARI VAJPAYEE, Prime Minister, condemning NATO action in Kosovo

■ Secularism is the known principle and theocracy has never been accepted in India.

L. K. ADVANI, Union home minister, to the visiting US congressional delegation

■ Some people don't seem to know how to behave in a coalition.

KUSHABHAU THAKRE, BJP president, reacting to AIADMK chief Jayalalitha's latest pull-out threat



■ As far as lipstick goes, most heroines opt for a matt finish instead of a thick pout with a glossy finish. That sums up the tale of modern make-up.

RUPA GANGULY, actress

■ Quarrels have started. Now no one can save them.

GIRIJA VYAS, Congress spokesperson, on the survival of the BJP-led coalition

■ The revenue department is obsessed with short-term measures and is penny wise and pound foolish.

RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE, commerce minister, on the finance ministry bureaucrats who opposed his move to reduce interest rate on export credit

■ That's the way I play, that's the way I know best.

AMAY KHURASIA, Indian batsman, after his blistering 57 in the Pune one-dayer against Sri Lanka

SEEN

ABOARD INS VIRAAAT

The PM's day at sea



WHAT A SEND-OFF: Admiral Sushil Kumar, Atal Behari Vajpayee and George Fernandes at the show; INS Viraat (right)

The entire PMO was at sea. There was the Prime Minister himself, looking very un-*sangh parivarish* in a beige safari suit and dark glasses. Even his private secretary Shakti Sinha had decided to take a break from his bureaucratic wardrobe and wore a printed shirt for the occasion. In fact, the entire PMO was in dark glasses.

But then, this was one day they could afford to relax. The PM was spending the entire day and night on board the INS Viraat. India's flagship—the aircraft carrier—was being given a ceremonial send-off before it was docked for two years of maintenance and repair work. To make the occasion even more historic, the *raksha mantri* was on board as well.

However, there was no mention of either Vishnu Bhagwat or Jayalalitha to mar the day. The toughest question the PM had to deal with was related to defence, not his defence minister! The pitching and rolling of the ship was nothing compared to what the PM's men have to deal with back home. Small wonder that no one felt seasick.

There really was no time for such indulgences as the entire Western Fleet put up a spectacular show for its visitors. From daring helicopter manoeuvres to Sea Harriers taking off and landing in the dark, to the firing of missiles and other weapons. It was quite a catwalk as India's naval strength preened and paraded before the Prime Minister.

For the hosts, coping with the PM and his entourage wasn't as tough as dealing with the fact that the press party had two women on board. The Viraat has no women officers, and the only two cabins with attached bathrooms were given to the PM and the *raksha mantri*. After rejecting all the options, which included airlifting the women by a chopper to the nearby Shakti for the night (the tanker has two women officers and hence suitable accommodations!), the men were told they could grin but they couldn't bare!

The best was saved for the last. After the show, the flight deck was opened to the visitors who wanted to stroll after dinner. A rare privilege as the deck has to be spic and span to ensure smooth take-offs and landings. Even as small an object as a pen comes under the category of an FOD (Foreign Object Disorder). I was also told that no one *walks* on the flight deck. You have to run around and look busy or else you have no business being there! But not only were we allowed to walk, we could even sit on the runway and sing songs. What a way to say goodbye.

I was wrong. Later, much later, at night, there was a knock on the door. Wake-up, you were told, there's a party on. At 2.30 am? With a two-in-one blaring music? On the deck, under the stars? Clearly, the Indian Navy was determined to make a conquest, first by displaying its arms and then, its charms. •

Priya Sahgal/INS Viraat

It was quite a catwalk as India's naval strength preened and paraded before the Prime Minister

AT PRIMER

Run, Georgie, run

*Georgie-Porgie pudding and pie
Kissed the girls and made them cry
But when the boys came out to play
Georgie-Porgie ran away*



It is now time for George to get on his marks. For going on four decades he has been making the Treasury benches cry. Now, he himself is on the Treasury benches and the Opposition boys have come out to play. If he runs away, Vajpayee will live another day. If George stays, there will be a JPC and day upon day it will be agonisingly and irreversibly revealed what an utterly unfit, dangerous

and, possibly, even traitorous defence minister George Fernandes has proved himself to be. And as the truth slowly seeps out, what little reputation the Prime Minister still has left will wither away as the question is insistently asked: "Why, George, why, for God's sake, George, of all people, for Raksha Mantri?"

There is still a way out. George, it will be recalled, by people with a memory as long as mine, was the minister who with consummate skill defended the Morarji Desai regime one morning of July 1979, only by the evening of the very same day to turn around and vote against the very government he had so ably defended. So here, Georgie boy, is a little tip: why not argue in the morning against a JPC and vote in the evening for it? Then resign — and leave it to Atal Behari to carry the can for you (and himself) in the JPC?

For make no mistake about it, George is in a jam. He thought he would get away with the invocation of the doctrinal mantra of the subordination of the military to the civil authority, and hide his dark doings behind the veil of national security and hush-hush brouhaha. He reckoned without the steel nerves and steely character of the adversary he had so thoughtlessly created for himself.

THE BHAGWAT PURANA, Vajpayee's catchy phrase, begins not on the day Fernandes was elevated to South Block but 39 years ago when Vishnu Bhagwat was inducted into the Indian Navy. He earned his epaulettes over close on four decades of dedicated work — to be regarded as the "most cerebral officer" in the armed forces. The phrase, ironically, is George's. My source is Bhagwat's affidavit. What George has to show Parliament — and then the JPC — is that this officer fooled four decades of superiors to earn such high marks that

GEORGE FERNANDES

years before George was considered for Raksha Mantri, Admiral Bhagwat made it to the top of the naval forces. Is our recruitment, promotion and selection procedure so flawed that a man fit for summary dismissal at the evensong of his career can pull the wool over everyone's eyes to earn nothing less than an "outstanding" grade consistently for 36 years? George will have to either show that he has wisdom and insight superior to all the naval chiefs and defence secretaries and Raksha Mantris who have preceded him these last four decades — or begin the story from his ascent to South Block less than nine months before Bhagwat was given the sack.

And as that story is built, he will have to answer some very harsh questions. One, was not Operation Leach a "routine, mandated operation" begun in February 1998 with due authorisation while he, George, was still fighting a doubtful election in Muzaffarpur, his present glory still veiled by what destiny held in store for him? Did he, as Raksha Mantri, do all he could to ensure the smooth conduct of that military operation?

Or did he, as Raksha Mantri, undermine the Operation, as alleged by Bhagwat? And, if so, why? Bhagwat in his affidavit cites a communication from the defence secretary to the chiefs of staff, dated 27 July 1998, instructing the chiefs to call off Operation Leach as "it did not wish such tri-service operations to continue and impede the flow of arm and ammunition to the North-East". Incredible! Brigadier Atmanathan, the Brigade Commander had, avers Bhagwat in his affidavit, informed the Raksha Mantri, at a briefing in Port Blair in May that "these arms were meant for rebels in the North-East and had these arms and ammunition not been apprehended, these would have been sufficient to tie up one whole division of the armed forces for a period of about one year".

APPALLED AT THIS attempt to interdict an Operation that was designed to save the lives of scores, perhaps hundreds of *jawans*, all three chiefs unanimously protested to the Raksha Mantri at a meeting called on 8 August, some ten days after the receipt of the defence secretary's circular. Fernandes was forced to relent but, says Bhagwat, still attempted to limit the effectiveness of the Operation by ordering that it be restricted to the Indian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). As Bhagwat points out, this was "illogical" as the EEZ "has



VISHNU BHAGWAT: Is our recruitment, promotion and selection procedure so flawed that a man fit for summary dismissal at the evensong of his career can pull the wool over everyone's eyes to earn nothing less than an "outstanding" grade consistently for 36 years?

no relation to the customs and contraband laws of the country" and, moreover, under international law, "arms carried by vessels in the high seas or international waters are subject to interception and apprehension if they are meant to wage war against member-states of the United Nations".

Why then these bizarre instructions? Perhaps the reason is to be found in George

Fernandes, who has never made a secret of his political sympathies, having boasted to the chiefs, as Bhagwat records, that "the North-East insurgents and the Burmese rebels had the freedom to operate from his house". Was George, as Bhagwat avers, deliberately "jeopardising the security interests of the country by wilfully allowing such arms into the North-East"?

There is another angle to this matter which is shrouded in unexplained asides in Bhagwat's affidavit but has been more clearly dealt with in a *Frontline* expose (fortnight ending 9 April, 1999). Says *Frontline* correspondent, S. Murlidharan, whereas Fernandes claims that Bhagwat tried to block an inquest into innocent civilians killed in one of these tri-service operations, "Bhagwat states in his affidavit that he had few reservations about the need for a civil inquest into the conduct of Operation Leach" but, bearing in mind what had happened when MV Ahat was apprehended in 1994 carrying LTTE arms, resulting in the suicide of LTTE activist Kittu who happened to be on board, Bhagwat had wanted "protection for the armed services personnel...At this the defence minister appeared upset". George's views on the LTTE are a matter of oft-repeated record. The blood on the hands of the LTTE of thousands of Indian *jawans* has not altered the Raksha Mantri's

view of the noble cause of the Tamil Tigers. Bhagwat refers to this obliquely: "(the) implied cooperation between some elements in India with the North-East insurgents and the LTTE," he says, "is well-known."

NOT ONLY DO these allegations of treachery need to be probed, also at issue

George's political career has been a climbing up the ladder of alleging corruption after corruption in high places. And now he is holst on his own petard



ATAL BEHARI VAJPAYEE

Why, once again, why, for God's sake, could the Prime Minister not think of anyone else, anyone else at all, for so sensitive a portfolio as defence?

is the blatant flouting of the careful procedures, built up over half-a-century of patient effort, to ensure that senior defence appointments are not politicised (which, if they are, will inevitably end in politicising the armed forces and threatening the continuation of our democracy). Our civilian democracy has been made possible because of the adamant refusal of the Indian armed forces to follow the example of their peers from Pakistan and Bangladesh to much of Africa and Latin America to play politics.

In painful detail, Bhagwat records how every institutional norm was blatantly transgressed to push into the key post of Deputy Chief of Naval Staff an officer whose cumulative record of "outstanding gradings" stretched over all of 16 months of a career spanning well over three decades. Why? Was it that his seniors in the navy had consistently, over decades, underestimated the genius of this man — or had it to do with the Akali Dal pressurising the same Prime Minister who had twice overruled Fernandes on Admiral Harinder Singh to succumb, third time round, to Parkash Singh Badal? Are we talking here of the Indian Navy — or the SGPC?

And is it true that the new chief has been appointed without the customary intelligence vetting? Is this wise after George has discovered that there is no alternative to sacking a chief appointed after the exhaustive completion of all due procedures, including intelligence vetting? Or is it that George avoids intelligence vetting because an intelligence vetting of his own record will show him up, as Bhagwat affirms, to be one of the most serious security risks in the country? Why, once again, why, for God's sake, could the Prime Minister not think of anyone else, anyone else at all, for so sensitive a portfolio? Why,

Sukh Ram would have made a better choice!

AND TALKING OF Sukh Ram, we come to the sweet smell of corruption, George's favourite perfume, which has made him the Christian Dior of corruption scandals. Georgie's political career has been a climbing up the ladder of alleging corruption after corruption in high places. And now he is hoist on his own petard. All innocent, he asks where is the proof — a trifling detail that never bothered him when he trumpeted his charges. Well, Gorshkov, the Russian aircraft carrier will have to be looked into; so will CKD/SKD kits from France for submarines (at a cool US\$ 350 million a throw); and the Prime Minister's principal secretary getting all matey with a mere vice-president from CSF Thomson, the French arms suppliers. Also the little matter of Crown Corporation, Moscow and Makalu Engineering, St Petersburg and the links between the chief of those agencies and the favoured Deputy Chief of Naval Staff of the Raksha Mantri. And, oh yes, the links too of S.M. Nanda (grandfather of the boy whose BMW killed six in a split second one winter's day a few months back) and the defence minister, stretching back to their days together decades ago, one as a labour leader in the Mazagaon Docks and the other as the managing director, before both went their respective ways to notoriety disguised as fame.

I suggest all these be dealt with exactly as a defence purchase of 13 years vintage — a thing called Bofors — was dealt with: by a JPC. Only this time, the Opposition will not walk out. It will sit there and run its finger through every single document until poor Georgie-Porgie is left twisting, slowly, slowly in the wind. •

In CRISIS

A.B. VAJPAYEE



Mode

promised her certain ministerial portfolios.

She claimed none of the promises had been kept.

The latest was the government's mismanagement of the Vishnu Bhagwat issue. As an ally she was entitled to know exactly what the reasons were for Bhagwat's sacking. George Fernandes' statements on the matter had been cryptic. It was the first time such a senior soldier had been removed from office. The ADMK wanted to know what circumstances had prompted such a drastic decision.

At least this much George Fernandes could do — he could explain to her why he'd decided to sack the naval chief. So armed with all the files, briefs and papers, he went to her suite at the Taj as summoned. "I wanted to discuss some sensitive matters with you ..." he began tentatively.

He found Jayalalitha cool. When he attempted to discuss the matter of the Advanced Transport Vehicle (ATV) with her, (*see elsewhere in the issue*), she was dis-

The Vishnu Bhagwat sacking brings political mayhem in its wake. Can the BJP government survive? Is India heading for another election?

A DMK leader Jayalalitha called defence minister George Fernandes from Madras. "I'm coming to Delhi," she said pleasantly, "and I'm letting you know in advance so that you can't say you didn't have time to see me."

Fernandes did a double take. So things were okay after all.

That Jayalalitha was not happy with the BJP has been this government's worst-kept secret. She has been claiming that as the largest ally of the BJP, she is entitled to more respect, but that the BJP just keeps breaking all the promises it makes to her. At the time they forged the electoral alliance more than a year ago, the government had promised it would help her in the cases of corruption against her. It had promised it would dismiss the DMK government. It had

missive. "Oh yes, the nuclear-powered submarine. I know all about that." She really didn't want to know what the government had charged Bhagwat with. She wanted his reinstatement.

Fernandes came away from that meeting puzzled and angry. He was even more puzzled when the ticker quoted Jayalalitha as saying that not only did she want Bhagwat's reinstatement, she also wanted Fernandes to be moved to some other ministry because he was a 'security risk'.

By now the BJP was clear that Jayalalitha's mood swings had nothing to do with George Fernandes' 'misdeemeanours' or the unjustness of the treatment meted out to the former naval chief. She was charming when she went to lunch with the Prime Minister's family. At the party thrown by BJP MP from Delhi, Vijay Goel, she told

reporters to leave the PM alone—that it was a 'social occasion'. She agreed at the meeting of the coordination committee that it wasn't practical to have a Joint Parliamentary Committee to probe Bhagwat's sacking. In other words, she was—publicly—all sweetness and light.

Yet, when human resources development minister Murli Manohar Joshi called on her, she talked for nearly 90 minutes about the BJP's broken promises. Joshi explained to her that the ADMK had a unique place in history: that MG Ramachandran and she had brought Tamil Nadu politics outside the narrow confines of the state and were to be admired for that. She had supported the *kar seva* for the Ram Temple at Ayodhya, at the National Integration Council meeting. Clearly, she had a feeling for history, culture and religion. It would be a pity if she were to walk out of the BJP-led government at this stage.



L.K. Advani: "We should not get involved in the numbers game"

Joshi left Jayalalitha believing that he had convinced her that staying in the alliance was politically the best option for her. It is another matter that Jayalalitha attended a tea party at which Sonia Gandhi was also a guest and made volatile statements about the 'political earthquake' which was taking place in Indian politics.

But the next bombshell was parliamentary affairs minister Rangarajan Kumaramangalam's statement from Goa, launching blistering attack on Jayalalitha, and charging that if she kept playing games with the BJP, she would have no credibility left in Tamil Nadu.

For most, this was a gobsmacker. Kumaramangalam claimed that he had permission "from my bosses" to make the statement. But the Prime Minister dissociated himself from it. So who were the bosses?

Obviously, the statement sent BJP-ADMK relations, such as they were, into a tailspin spiralling downwards. Coming at a time when, in fact, attempts were being made to build bridges between Jayalalitha and the BJP to ensure the government's stability, this was calculated to throw a spanner in the works. So now it wasn't just the ADMK which wanted to bring down the government it was also the BJP.

The scene now shifted to Goa.

Ms Un

But there is a method t

In the 1970s, Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon made a new contribution to the conduct of international relations. They called it the 'Madman theory of politics'. The background was as follows: because both Russia and America had nuclear capability, their bombs were believed to have cancelled each other out. If a Russian President bombed Washington, he could be sure that Moscow would be destroyed within hours. If an American President bombed Leningrad, then New York would be nuked in return. This was known as the doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD).

Kissinger and Nixon realised that this made their bombs irrelevant. The Russians would know that given the certainty of Mutually Assured Destruction, no sensible American President would dare to start a nuclear war. The only way to bring the bombs into play again was to convince the Russians that the American President was not a sensible person, that he was so irrational that he might use the bomb anyway. In other words, he was a madman.

One hesitates to use the word 'madwoman' in relation to Jayalalitha, but she is using her own Madman theory of politics. Any sensible person will know that for the ADMK to withdraw support from the BJP government would be suicidal. The Congress has not been particularly welcoming, the numbers don't add up for a non-BJP government and even if such a government were to be installed, there is nothing it could give her that the BJP has not already provided. So, the BJP has rested easy, recognising that it would make no sense for Jayalalitha to actually pull out.

But if you take the line that the ADMK leader is not a sensible person, that she is irrational, then all such comfortable calculations become invalid. You believe that she is so irrational that she might withdraw support, even if it is suicidal.

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Jayalalitha's many mood swings and changes of stance have been deliberately calculative to convey the impression that she could do *anything*. One day, she will be charmingly solicitous to A.B. Vajpayee, the next day she will spit venom against his government. One day, she will describe Sonia Gandhi as an old friend at a tea-party, the next day she will derisively suggest that Sonia can't read English newspapers. One day, she will pour her heart out to Pramod Mahajan, the next day she will issue a public statement, calling him a crook.



Subramanian Swamy

predictable

Jayalalitha's madness

Those in the BJP who take the line that she is a nutcase, an unstable woman who cannot be trusted are playing her game. Once they believe that she is unstable, they are vulnerable to any threat that she may choose to level.

Not only is there method to her madness, there's also a cool calculation in the decision to use Subramanian Swamy against the BJP. When the ADMK was allied with the Congress, Narasimha Rao used Swamy as a means of keeping Jayalalitha in check. Each time she protested to Rao about Swamy's attacks on her, the PM shrugged: "What can I do? He is his own man." So it is with Jayalalitha, Swamy and the BJP. She uses Swamy to attack Vajpayee and open doors for the Congress. But everything he does is always deniable. The moment she changes her mind, she can always disown Swamy and move on to the next part of her strategy.

Clearly, the former convent schoolgirl-turned-actress has become one of the shrewdest manipulators on the Indian political scene.



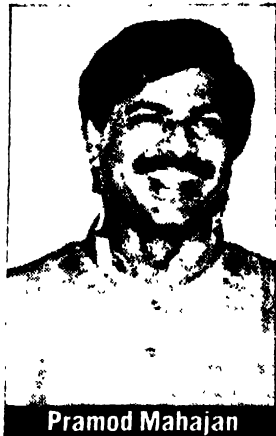
GOA DIARY: SOME LIGHTER MOMENTS

- Before the BJP national executive began, party general secretary Sanghupriya Gautam informed the assembled gathering that unfortunately the conference hall had only one bathroom nearby. He gravely advised various Cabinet ministers and office bearers: "*Jin-jin ko jaana ho, vo aapas mein pehli se decide kar le.*"

- The hospitality desk at Hotel Cidade Goa received a very strange request at 9 pm on the second day of the BJP meet. Rangarajan Kumaramangalam needed his *kurta* to be shortened; so could house-keeping send someone who could hem? He had been advised to take this step by a very unlikely fashion guru: Dr Murli Manohar Joshi. Watching Rangarajan in one of his flowing Fab India *kurtas*, Joshi pointed out that if he was going to wear such long *kurtas*, why bother wearing pyjamas?

- Just before A.B. Vajpayee left for the airport, cameramen requested him to pose in the lawns. Since L.K. Advani was seeing him off, both leaders stood in front of a bush and smiled uncomfortably in silence. Exasperated, the photographers asked them if they could interact and talk to each other. "If nothing else, could you at least *pretend* to have a conversation?" asked one cameraman.

- The PM is known to be a stickler for punctuality, but in Goa he took the officials in the PMO by surprise. In his haste to be on time for the BJP rally, he left a few minutes earlier than



Pramod Mahajan



Sudheendra Kulkarni



R. Kumaramangalam

scheduled. As his cavalcade sped past after him, he didn't realise he'd left behind some very important men: Shakti Sinha (private secretary), Ashok Priyadarshi (joint secretary), Anand Rajan (additional private secretary) and Ashoke Tandon (media adviser). The only member of the PMO accompanying Vajpayee to the rally was Sudheendra Kulkarni.

- Most people missed an advertisement in the local papers welcoming Shakti Sinha back to Goa. Sinha had been a Collector in Goa during the Konkani agitation. And an editorial in the *Mirror* (a local paper) pointed out that though Sinha joined the PM during his earlier 13-day stint, "he proved his loyalty by remaining with Atal Behari Vajpayee even after the fall of the BJP government". Whatever that means!

And the way things are going, Sinha may soon get another chance to prove his loyalty.

- Pramod Mahajan has done it again. First he made news for being one of the first BJP members to acquire a cellphone. In fact, most claimed that he carried two of them (as the joke went, one was for Jet Airways and the other for Tata Airlines). During the BJP's national executive in Goa, Mahajan was seen sporting his latest possession: a slightly-cumbersome but technotrendy Iridium satellite phone. Wonder what the *swadeshi* lobby has to say about that?

Priya Sakgal

The meeting of office-bearers of the BJP in Goa, led by party president Kushabhau Thakre was significant. Party leader Narendra Modi was the first to make the point that the BJP felt it had enough of attacks by Jayalalitha. This was echoed by BJP leader from Bihar, Kailashpati Mishra, who said the party's image was suffering because of the humiliation they were having to put up with from Jayalalitha. In other words, all the Thakre loyalists believed that it was time to jettison Jayalalitha.

The government's humiliation and powerlessness was described most graphically by delegates from Karnataka. They said that there was a slim chance of the BJP improving its standing in Karnataka. But this was being frittered away because of the government's equivocation of Jayalalitha's charges. It was decided that while the Prime Minister must distance himself from Kumaramangalam's remarks, the party should stand by them.

This much was okay. But the matter wasn't confined to this.

It was introduced so insidiously that it almost wasn't noticed.

Party leader Govindacharya, in his speech, made the point first. Yes, it was all very distressing. Jayalalitha would probably pull out of the government. We should not make any attempt to prevent her. Because, it was the question of the government's image.

Image? But surely the BJP should have thought about its image in associating with Jayalalitha *before* it decided to do a deal with her? And in any case, what was the point of having an image if you didn't have a government?

Home minister L.K. Advani developed this theory further. "We should not get involved in the numbers game," he told the office-bearers. It was the question of the image of the BJP. If anyone was thinking of doing a deal with a section of the Congress, they should give up the idea forthwith.

But the RSS was equally clear. Speakers from the Sangh said that the government had to be saved from falling. Any-

one who helped would be welcome. However, nobody in the BJP was under any illusion about the motivations of those who wanted the BJP to guard its 'image'. Why had the issue of its image been raised only at a time when it was otherwise shaky? Why didn't this strike anyone when Jayalalitha was *not* threatening the government?

By the time the BJP had left Goa and reached Delhi, everything was already in place. Jayalalitha had withdrawn her ministers from the government, had put the Vajpayee government on notice of seven days and was seeking actively to topple it.

After the brief public appearance at the tea party for Jayalalitha, Congress president Sonia Gandhi had gone underground, leaving her own flock confused and worried. If the BJP government was defeated on the floor of the House, the mantle of stepping in would fall on the Congress and the ADMK. But how could the Congress do a deal with the ADMK? A party which had supported the

kar seva, which was so right-wing that it wanted the private sector to build national highways and wanted denationalisation of banks? How could they forget the dismissive, racist statements made by Jayalalitha about Sonia Gandhi?

Besides, there were other problems. Was Sonia Gandhi ready to form the government? Would she be able to keep Mulayam Singh Yadav and Laloo Yadav at bay? If they joined the government, wouldn't it affect the Congress's image? Did the Congress really need to rush in to form a government?

In the din that has followed Vishnu Bhagwat's sacking, the reason the government is in a crisis, has receded into the far distance. Whether the current phase of trouble teaches India anything or not, there is a lesson in it for the admiral: if you try to use the system, the odds are, it will end up using you.

Whether the BJP has learnt anything from the episode is as yet unclear. At the time of writing, it had reconciled



The tea party at Vijay Goel's house: after the brief public appearance at the party for Jayalalitha, Sonia Gandhi had gone underground, leaving her own flock confused and worried

itself to losing power. All the gains of the Lahore trip, making up with Pakistan, the nuclear tests, its riot-free tenure, have translated into a big zero.

The party in the biggest dilemma is the Congress. Can it form the government? Should it?

But then, can it let this opportunity go? Can it afford to be the reason for another general election?

What began as the story of the sacking of a CNS has turned into a crisis for India. Bhagwat has ensured a place in history for himself. But not for bravery. •

Aditi Phadnis with Priya Sahgal/New Delhi and Sreedhar Pillai/Madras



SUNDAY 11—17 April 1990

THE AVENGER AND THE ADMIRAL

The key to understanding the Fernandes-Bhagwat dispute lies in understanding George Fernandes himself

Of all the issues that arise from the dismissal of Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat, the most puzzling question is this: how is it that George Fernandes, perceived by the armed forces as the soldiers' friend, as the best defence minister in living memory, has suddenly become the enemy of the Navy, the symbol of political interference in the armed forces?

Moreover, why is it that Fernandes, often accused of being over-eager to side with men in uniform against the civilian authority of the defence ministry, has been so uncompromising on the Bhagwat issue? He has, he says, no regrets except perhaps that he didn't sack Bhagwat earlier.

As puzzling is the list of misdemeanours that led to Bhagwat's sacking. Talk of 'national security', of 'defiance of civilian authority', suggests a saga of espionage, of a *coup d'etat* nipped in the bud. But probe deeper and you find that though Fernandes' case is convincing — the real question is not why Bhagwat was sacked but how he was appointed in the first place — the issues were less about espionage or military ambition and more about that simplest of all disputes: disagreements about personnel.

Listen to Fernandes as he talks in that quiet, intense monotone for hours about the Bhagwat affair and you realise that as far as he was concerned, the real problem was that Bhagwat committed what was to Fernandes a cardinal sin: he tried to use his position to fix, manipulate and victimise those below him.

And George, for 50 years a champion of the oppressed, of the victimised, of the unjustly accused, simply would not forgive him for that.

TAKE THE ISSUES that caused the two men to fall out. Bhagwat wanted a deputy naval attache in Moscow, a Commodore Bandopadhyay, to be shifted out before his term was through. The man had dubious integrity, Bhagwat suggested. George, fair to all concerned right to the end, decided to double-check to ensure that poor Bandopadhyay was not being victimised. Everybody in the Navy gave the Commodore a clean chit. George then called Ronen Sen who had been Bandopadhyay's ambassador in Moscow. Was the Commodore a crook? Not at all, said Sen, he was a perfectly decent chap. And he was willing to say so in writing.

My God, thought George, what kind of man is Bhagwat that he is willing to fix a subordinate and ruin a decent man's career?

The Sushil Kumar saga evoked the same kind of responses. Kumar had been reconciled to retiring as vice-admiral till the retirement age was raised by two years. Recognising that he now had a chance to become navy chief, he asked Bhagwat if he could be put in charge of a command. Bhagwat promised to consider the request and then did nothing. Kumar sent him letter after letter and representation after representation. In apparent violation of the Navy's rules, Bhagwat ignored them all. Finally, a desperate Sushil Kumar sent a representation directly to the defence minister.

The moment Bhagwat found out, he called Sushil Kumar on an open line. According to Kumar, Bhagwat berated him for going above his head and threatened to court martial him. At that stage, Kumar panicked. If the Navy instituted proceedings against him, then his career was effectively over. Even the defence minister could not intervene once a court martial had begun.

There is a certain inevitability to what followed. Kumar called Fernandes in terror. George, true to his nature, was stolidly reassuring. Why are you worried? he said. I'm sitting here.

It was the old George again: the fighter against injustice, the champion of the victimised.

EVERY EPISODE in the Fernandes-Bhagwat story follows a similar plotline. Bhagwat attempts to fix an officer. Said officer complains to Fernandes. Defence minister investigates and finds case of injustice. Fernandes becomes convinced that Bhagwat is a venal person.

The Harinder Singh saga remains true to this script. Bhagwat hates Harinder. In an effort to fix him, he puts negative remarks into his confidential report. Harinder stayed with an arms dealer in Moscow. He enjoyed lavish hospitality in St Petersburg. And so on. Harinder complains to George. It turns out that he stayed in the one-bedroom apartment of a college friend in Moscow and that the friend does not deal in arms. George deletes the first negative remark.

What about St Petersburg? It emerges that Harinder and family never even went to St Petersburg. George confronts Bhagwat. All right, concedes the naval chief, I'll withdraw that one. But now Bhagwat has a new objection. When President Narayanan visited the Andamans, Harinder arranged for him to travel in a one-engine chopper. Naval regulations specify a two-engine chopper. So, Harinder endangered the life of the President of India and is unsuitable for any promotion.

George calls Rashtrapati Bhavan. The military secretary confirms, after talking to Narayanan, that Harinder had told him that he couldn't let him travel by chopper as there was no suitable helicopter available at the time. Narayanan said: never mind, the seas are too rough, so I'm not going by boat; I insist on any chopper you have, regardless of naval regulations.



Over a year ago, Bhagwat decided that Vice-Admiral Bhushan (key to the ATV project) would get no more extensions. More significantly, he persuaded the DRDO's Abdul Kalam (above) to go along with this in writing

Bhagwat has nothing left to lose, so he can integrity, he can attribute communal motives to other officers and he can



The thing to remember about the current dispute is that both men see it through the prism of their own experiences. Bhagwat sees himself fighting some politician who is trying to interfere with his job. George sees Bhagwat as a vindictive and unfair boss



George hears the story and is appalled. He's even more horrified when he finds — or at the very least, thinks he finds — that Bhagwat is post-dating and tampering his comments on Harinder's report. He scratches out every negative response and asks the Cabinet to promote Harinder.

What kind of man is this, the defence minister thinks, he only wants to play politics within the officer cadre?

IT IS ONLY when you see things in this light that you understand the depth of feelings on both sides. Bhagwat is an extremely cerebral officer (Fernandes' phrase), a man who, even his friends concede, regards himself as being vastly superior to 99 per cent of humanity. Throughout his career, Bhagwat has fought with seniors, never compromised on anything, and accused senior officers of being either foolish or dishonest or both. To Bhagwat, his word is law. His assessments of officers are the ones that count. And if some defence minister has his own ideas of who should be promoted, well, he can shove off.

Fernandes prides himself on fairness. This is the man who trained to be a Catholic priest till he ran away from a seminary in Mangalore at the age of 15 and arrived in Bombay with nothing. He slept on the pavement, he went hungry, he rode trams at night because there was nowhere he could find a bed, and decided that money did not matter. What did matter were the causes. Fernandes found lots of causes in Bombay: the BEST union, the quarry workers, the Samyukta Maharashtra movement, the campaign against S.K. Patil and the Congress' bossism, etc.

If Bhagwat did not change even after he became chief, so it is with Fernandes. He remains, in essence, a man who picks up causes with the intensity of Mother Teresa collecting the dying. Are the Tibetans fighting the Chinese occupation? Well, then, George will fight with them. Is Aung San Suu Kyi fighting the brutal Burmese junta? Well, then, Suu Kyi's struggle is George's struggle. Is the home ministry deporting Burmese students to certain death in their homeland? Well, then, they can seek shelter in George's house; the home ministry will have to arrest Fernandes before it can deport them.

His attitude to the armed forces has been shaped by his early experiences. He may be defence minister and big boss but emotionally, George is always on the side of those he sees as disadvantaged. Are bureaucrats denying snowmobiles to our brave jawans in Siachen? Really? Not only will George ensure that our boys get the snowmobiles but he will see to it that the bureaucrats who sat on the files get their own postings to Siachen. Have soldiers died in a bomb explosion thousands of miles from Delhi? George will drop everything, cancel all his appointments, fly to the funerals and console the families.

The thing to remember about the current dispute is that both men see it through the prism of their own experiences. Bhagwat sees himself as the brilliant officer who knows the Navy inside out, fighting some politician who is trying to interfere with his job. George, on the other hand, sees Bhagwat as a vindictive and unfair boss and himself as the avenger, as the Good Man who, for once, has the power to make things right and fight injustice.

SADLY FOR GEORGE, the cerebral boss seems to have won the public relations battle against the intense avenger. The image that Bhagwat has successfully sold to the country (once his wife shut up and he took over his own PR) is that of a dedicated professional fighting political interference. (Hence, the title of one of his public statements: From A Soldier Of The Republic.)

Because Bhagwat has nothing left to lose, he can say what he likes. He can call George a security risk, he can impugn his integrity (surely, the first time that any one of consequence has dared do so in George's 50 years in public life), he can attribute communal motives to other officers and he can say he's fighting for the independence of the Navy.

But what can George say? Can he say that he thought Bhagwat was being unfair to

say what he likes. He can call George a security risk, he can impugn his

say he's fighting for the independence of the Navy. But what can George say?

a commodore-rank officer? Would anyone believe that the defence minister of India turned against the navy chief over an affair as trifling as this? Can he recount the saga of Harinder's confidential report? Who will believe that the defence minister spent so much time trying to find out from Rashtrapati Bhavan why K.R. Narayanan used a one-engine helicopter in the Andamans?

So, George has decided to remain quiet. He knows he can't talk about Operation Leech, the subject of one of Bhagwat's allegations, without compromising national security. He can't even talk about the ATV affair because that is top secret.

But the ATV episode tells you something about how a personnel matter can blow up into a national security issue.

The ATV is a code name for a nuclear-powered submarine that India is building with Russian help. The programme has been in existence for years but the official Government of India position has always been: submarine? What submarine? So secret is the ATV project that the files are kept in the Prime Minister's Office and not in the defence ministry. Each outgoing Prime Minister briefs his successor about the programme.

The ATV project has been headed for many years by a Vice-Admiral Bhushan who keeps getting extensions because it is believed that he is the key to the programme. Over a year ago, Bhagwat decided that Bhushan would get no more extensions. More significantly, he was able to persuade the DRDO's Abdul Kalam to go along with this in writing.

When Bhushan's term expired, Kalam went to see Fernandes. Sir, he said, Bhushan needs an extension because only he can do this project. Fine, said George, let's give him an extension. Well, sir, said Kalam sheepishly, there is a problem. Bhagwat persuaded me to sign a paper saying he should get no more extensions. But do you believe he deserves an extension, asked George. Kalam responded: yes sir. George was satisfied. Okay, let's give it to him.

When news of the extension reached Bhagwat, he stormed into the defence minister's office. How could Bhushan get an extension? Wasn't Fernandes aware that Kalam had opposed this in writing? In fact, Bhagwat had even located his successor, a Vice-Admiral Ganesh. In any case, the project was badly delayed, Bhushan was having a nice time making frequent trips to Moscow, and a change was due. Fernandes was unpersuaded. "If you are so convinced," he finally conceded to Bhagwat, "perhaps we should consider a technical audit of the project."

The very next day there was a note on his desk from Bhagwat. He had appointed the audit committee, settled its terms of reference, given it a deadline and had picked its members. At its head would be — surprise! surprise! — Vice-Admiral Ganesh.

Fernandes was unmoved. But a few days later, he was angered beyond belief. Both *The Hindu* and *The Hindustan Times* carried detailed stories on the ATV project. Both stories made the point that the project was behind schedule and over-budget. In other words, they made exactly the same case that Bhagwat had made to Fernandes.

George sent for Bhagwat. Had he leaked the stories? No, said Bhagwat resolutely. Well, said Fernandes, I haven't leaked them, nor has Abdul Kalam. There is no third person who knows all this. The damage to national security is immense. We have spent 20 years denying that we have such a project because the moment there is official confirmation, the Americans will stop the Russians from supplying with the technology. You have endangered all this only because you want to get rid of Bhushan.

Bhagwat stuck to his denial. But Fernandes remained angry. How else could anybody know this, he demanded.

Bhagwat looked superior. "It's all on the Internet," he said and ended the conversation.

FERNANDES CANNOT, UNDER any circumstances, talk about the ATV in Parliament. To do so would be to call every Indian government over the last 20 years a liar. But at the same time, strangely enough, we in the press can talk about it because the



Sadly for George, the cerebral boss seems to have won the PR battle against the intense avenger. The image that Bhagwat has successfully sold to the country is that of a dedicated professional fighting political interference

Fernandes prides himself on fairness.

arrived in Bombay with nothing. He slept on the pavement, he went hungry,



In the Andamans, Harinder Singh told Narayanan that there was no suitable helicopter available. Narayanan said: the seas are too rough, so I'm not going by boat; I insist on any chopper you have, regardless of naval regulations



secrecy has been completely breached by the two leaked stories. And yet, even if the ATV project does get mentioned in Parliament, it will only benefit Bhagwat. Why is it over-budget, he will ask. Why is Fernandes shielding Bhushan? There are thousands of crores at stake here. Where are they going? Why is the minister so unwilling to agree to an audit? Is somebody lining his pockets? And is that somebody George Fernandes? The scope for innuendo is almost limitless.

What then can George do? As of now, he has no answers. He has three options. The first — which he's already rejected — is to dispense with national security and tell the whole story in Parliament. The second — which, knowing George, will come into play this week — is to tell Parliament that he is convinced that what he did was right but that if the government's survival is at stake, he would be quite happy to give up his job. The third — the one he's adopted — is to tell a partial story, to talk about lack of respect for civilian authority and top-secret projects. So far, at least, the third approach has been a disaster in PR terms.

BUT TO ANSWER the question we posed at the beginning: How did George Fernandes, champion of the armed forces, become, in the public eye, an interfering politician who tampered with the last great functioning institution of Indian democracy?

The reason is simple enough. If you fight for the armed forces against the babus and against the politicians, then the country will applaud and *jawans* will hang your picture up in the barracks.

But if you take the line that the enemy of the soldier, the opponent of the sailor, is within the armed forces themselves, then you will find few takers for that position. We will cheer a man who fights to save the Navy from the defence secretary. But take a more complicated position — fight to save the Navy from its own chief — and not only do you fight alone, but this is one battle you could well lose. •

Vir Sanghvi

**This is the man who ran away from a seminary at the age of 15 and
and decided that money did not matter. What did matter were the causes**



THE REAL VISH

*Jayalalitha is
backing the
wrong cause*

When late last month Jayalalitha went in the United Services Institution (USI) in Delhi Cantonment, ostensibly seeking her first-ever briefing on national security and defence of the realm from retired service officers, senior naval officers failed to educate her on naval ethos and traditions. Otherwise, they would have told her that reinstatement of Vishnu Bhagwat was out of the question. They would also have told her that while "a soldier of the republic" can certainly be court martialed, subjecting the office of the Chief of Naval Staff (CNS) to such grave indignity was also out of the question.

The least painful option would have been the offer of voluntary retirement, as many senior officers before Bhagwat have taken, but knowing his litigious and self-destructing mindset, the government might well have ended up with a CNS holding on to his office by a stay order. For the same reason, his successor's appointment had to be a surgical operation.

It is too late in the day to remind Jayalalitha that the honourable course for Bhagwat was to have put in his papers and faded away instead of indulging in mudslinging over the last three months. He has leaked confidential letters and documents to the press, publicly attacked Army Chief Gen. Ved Malik and compared himself to Gens Thimayya and Manekshaw (*SUNDAY, 7-13 March and 21-27 March, 1999*). Lt Gen. S.K. Sinha (retd), Governor of Assam, Air Marshal Brajesh Jayal and



NU BHAGWAT

many distinguished soldiers have upheld the government's decision to sack Bhagwat. Whenever Jayalalitha becomes the Prime Minister, she can appoint him as her national security adviser. But after discovering from this piece the real Bhagwat, she may have second thoughts.

Bhagwat reached the pinnacle of notoriety when he circulated the baseless and slanderous affidavit of 14 March, 1999, which contained so much trash about his motives: "Vindicate my honour and that of the armed forces, the highest traditions of the service, salvage my good reputation and dignity of the armed forces and establish my service to the Navy was without blemish."

Now almost every rating and officer in the Navy has known he is a self-serving officer, hell-bent on destroying the Navy. Look at his blemished record (*see box*). Bhagwat will go down in history as one who became CNS despite being "not recommended" first for fleet command, then for promotion to Vice-Admiral and finally for CNS. His other landmark contributions to naval archives is the 400-page writ petition 2757/90. When he took over as CNS in September 1996, as many as six of the 53 admirals in the Navy had complaints pending against him.

Sample remarks on his 'good reputation' from his confidential reports: 'an ambitious complex personality...who has established wide network of political and bureaucratic contact...he is personality-oriented, does not enjoy trust and

George Fernandes:
Among the many charges he has levelled against Fernandes, the most celebrated is about George being such a grave security risk that Bhagwat and other service chiefs were told "not to inform the minister about the nuclear tests"

HOW BHAGWAT HUMILIATED SUSHIL KUMAR

While page 33 of the Bhagwat affidavit explains the established convention of promotion to CNS — only after command of either of the two operational commands (east or west) — it excludes facts crucial to the case.

- Admiral S. Kumar was the second seniormost officer after Bhagwat and two years senior to Admiral Madhavendra Singh in Western Command.

- Kumar agreed to take up assignment in Southern Command which is also the training command and has an operational role under Western Command because he was not in the running for CNS, because of the age factor.

- In May 1998, the government issued orders for two-year extension of service. This made Kumar eligible for CNS. So beginning June, he started requesting

Bhagwat to assign him to one of the two mandatory operational commands. He wrote at least six letters but without any reply as Bhagwat was determined to subject him to the humiliation of being operationally subordinate to Madhavendra Singh, two years his junior.

- Exercise Triamph 98 was held off Mangalore in Kumar's regional command but under the jurisdiction of Madhavendra.

BHAGWAT: THE WARRIOR YOU DID NOT KNOW

Vishnu Bhagwat has given 23 reasons why Harinder Singh should have been appointed Deputy Chief of Naval Staff (DCNS). Naval sources have on record, 43 reasons why Bhagwat should never have reached the high office of CNS. Some of these are:

- While commissioning INS Ranjit in 1982-83 in USSR, he committed serious indiscretion, bypassing superior authority and dealing directly with Soviet officials.

- Violated the Naval Act by sending

commissioning signal in clear, instead of cipher.

- Sailing back to India in 1983, he opened fire on a Pakistani aircraft in international waters which could have led to war.

- In 1984, there was a shootout on his ship between two officers. Instead of taking the blame, he tried to pass it on to his second-in-command.

- Tried to influence the outcome of his

medical reports at INHS Ashwini by behaving in an unbecoming manner. (The record states that he fell on his knees and begged the doctors to clear his report.)

- He was involved in accessing secret documents held in the safe of his superior and photocopying them.

- Some members of the USO Club in Bombay took him to court in 1996. The court commented adversely on him and the Western Naval Command.

- He made possible for his lawyer wife

confidence of his colleagues, is held in low esteem...has low acceptability, has violated Naval Act and Official Secrets Act, been awarded severe displeasure", etc. Ironically, the only positive recommendation about Bhagwat was the CNS in 1990, that "the services of Rear Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat be immediately terminated..."

Little wonder, the officers assembled in the ward room of the Viraat last week told me they were happy to see him go: "A big boulder is off our back." They also said that George Fernandes found out Bhagwat quickly and had the courage to sack him. However, "he has the reputation of pulling down chiefs and potential chiefs — that is his evil genius." So Fernandes has to be careful.

That is not all. These officers commented on the way Bhagwat humiliated present CNS Sushil Kumar and terrorised the much-maligned Harinder Singh



Pawar: In Bhagwat's many cases, Pawar was generous to a fault

- Kumar, receiving no reply from Bhagwat, made the distress call to George Fernandes on 27 November after Bhagwat threatened him with dire consequences.

- Justice was done and the humiliation undone on 1 April, 1998, when Admiral Sushil Kumar's flag flew over the Viraat and Vice-Admiral Madhavendra Singh cheerfully carried out fleet operations under his overall command.

to deliver lectures at the Naval War College for which she was paid from naval funds.

■ He made possible for his wife to fly to Calcutta and back in a service aircraft in December 1998, so that she could appear in a court case. He had to fudge duty to Port Blair so that she could accompany him.

Admiral Sushil Kumar with Vajpayee: threatened with dire consequences



(see box). Others fared no better. He would threaten and traumatise his subordinates by yelling, "Bring me his dossier. I'll fix him." His favourite pastime was tampering with dossiers. A senior captain on Viraat said: "He's a consummate liar. But to be fair to him, financially upright." A commander remarked, "He's talking about the dignity of the armed forces. In the US Navy, a CNS committed suicide when it was pointed out he was wearing an unauthorised medal."

The 51-page affidavit is replete with factual inaccuracies, laced with bad judgement. Among some names mentioned and living are K. Subrahmanyam, Brajesh Mishra and Gen. Rodrigues. The first two have categorically rejected the allegations made against George Fernandes they are supposed to have been privy to. Bhagwat has called Rodrigues a 'true secularist' who controlled the

situation after the demolition of Babri Masjid. As a true secularist, Rodrigues, with a brigade standing by at Ayodhya should have prevented the demolition of Babri Masjid. He could not because

Officers on the Viraat said that they were happy to see Bhagwat go. They also said that Fernandes found out Bhagwat quickly and had the courage to sack him. However, "he has the reputation of pulling down chiefs and potential chiefs: that is his evil genius"

Bhagwat's mentor and then defence minister Sharad Pawar had turned him into a lame-duck chief by extracting an unqualified written apology for a careless interview to a newspaper.

But in Bhagwat's many cases, Sharad Pawar was generous to a fault. First, he allowed him to withdraw his WP 2757/90 through an application of April 1991 without any penalty on Bhagwat for violating Naval Act and official Secrets Act.

Next, he ensured he was given the fleet command and later, in 1992, had his name inserted for promotion from rear admiral to vice admiral despite being rejected by the naval board. Pawar inveigled the defence secretary into writing a noting 'overlooking' the recommendations of the naval board which the defence minister happily endorsed. The file was not moved in the normal course to the ACC as the matter was considered

TERROR CAMPAIGN AGAINST HARINDER

Contrary to popular misconception Vice-Admiral Harinder Singh is an outstanding officer. Unfortunately, another Bhagwat victim.

■ The Promotion Board 1/96 under chairmanship of CNS found only Harinder Singh out of five admirals as fit for rank of vice-admiral. He was rated outstanding.

■ Harinder became Bhagwat's target in 1982 when Harinder was in the intelligence branch and Bhagwat had committed breaches of security while in the USSR. Later on, becoming CNS, Bhagwat sent Harinder to the Andaman

and Nicobar Islands but refused to accept him as DCNS despite the officer being fit in all respects and seniormost. Therefore, Harinder filed a statutory complaint upon which Bhagwat served him a showcause notice.

■ Complete surveillance was kept on the movement of all officers of that command. Officers who entered or left were screened. One Capt. B.R. Sen, sent to Vizag to obtain equipment for the annual sound and light show at Port Blair, was intercepted, interrogated and ordered to return. Similarly, Capt. Chakrapani, sent to Calcutta for routine chores, was also intercepted and taken for

interrogation including a telephonic inquisition by Bhagwat himself. Within days, he was transferred to Vizag.

■ Harinder Singh's personal and his command's private and public accounts were subjected to embarrassing scrutiny. His mandatory authority to send officers on temporary duty, was curtailed. His own travel out of the islands was restricted.

■ In December, Bhagwat ordered the cutting of direct teletel between Port Blair and Delhi, and the detention in Delhi, of Harinder's communications centre officer, Lt Cdr Sathindran. Both were restored to Port Blair on 31 December



H.D. Deve Gowda: Pawar ensured that Gowda appointed Bhagwat as the CNS against the recommendations

"too sensitive" Pawar took the file by hand to Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, who approved his promotion to vice admiral.

If in 1992, the Congress considered Bhagwat's mere promotion such a sensitive issue that it bypassed the ACC, it is strange it does not find his dismissal, approved by the Cabinet committee on security, equally if not more sensitive to be discussed. It was Pawar again who ensured Prime Minister Deve Gowda appointed him as CNS against the recommendations of the CNS and his dismal performance card. The man who should

have been dismissed in 1990 was finally sacked in 1998, but only after he had ripped the Navy apart for nine long years.

This is the Bhagwat the Congress appointed and sustained in office in the Navy. The same Bhagwat is now being nurtured for totally different reasons. The political admiral has been turned into a political football by the Opposition parties.

Among the many charges he has levelled against George Fernandes, the most celebrated is about Fernandes being such a grave security risk that Bhagwat

and other service chiefs were told "not to inform the minister about the nuclear tests". The army chief and the National Security Adviser, who were also present, have denied such a twisted direction was ever given.

George Fernandes denies he ever called Bhagwat a security risk. But the latter cleverly deflected the charge. Their individual pasts have continued to haunt both Fernandes and Bhagwat. Asked to explain the Bhagwat charge that he had breached the Navy's chain of command, Fernandes retorted: "On the contrary, I saved the naval chain of command and came in only after orders from the court in the case of Harinder Singh and the distress call of 27 November from Sushil Kumar [see box]."

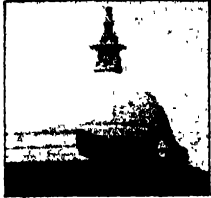
History will record the profound disservice Bhagwat did to the Navy in particular and the armed forces in general. He has no conception of the wheels within wheels of operations clubbed under 'Leech' and their ramifications on international relations and national security. Similarly, his breaches of sensitive information on vital indigenous projects (see story elsewhere). Already, last week, a US Congressional report has surfaced about India's future capacity to launch nuclear-tipped missiles from nuclear-powered submarine on the United States.

A lawyer, Sripad Halbe, is writing a book on Bhagwat. He will find it difficult to give it a happy ending. •

Maj. Gen. Ashok K. Mehta/New Delhi

Parleys in peril

The Indo-US nuclear dialogue runs into rough weather



Official sources may be coy about admitting it but the nuclear dialogue between this country and the United States looks like running into a very rough patch. This rude reality is of course at variance with the anodyne the country is routinely fed about the progress of the parleys between Jaswant Singh and Strobe Talbott. What is surprising is

that the American side has chosen to create difficulties on what is unquestionably the easiest of the four "bench marks" stipulated by the US for a nuclear understanding with this country, the requirement of "nuclear export controls."

In this respect India's record is "absolutely impeccable," even according to the most rabid of America's nuclear fundamentalists. Americans know that way back in 1978, New Delhi had courteously but firmly turned down Moamar Gadaffi's offer to underwrite the entire Indian foreign debt in return for nuclear weapons technology, displayed four years earlier at Pokhran. Saddam Hussein's similar importunings later had met the same fate. So much so that soon after P.V. Narasimha Rao became Prime Minister, New Delhi shamefully backed out of a deal with Teheran under which a five-megawatt nuclear research reactor was to be supplied to Iran under IAEA safeguards.

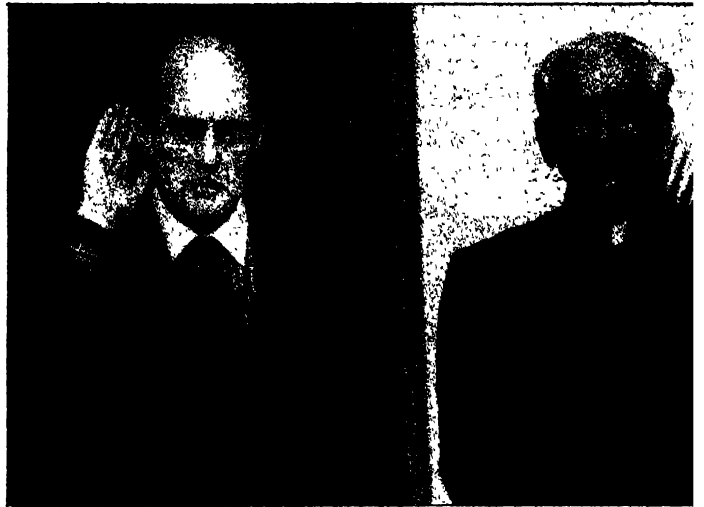
Under these circumstances, the issue of nuclear export controls could have been resolved speedily and smoothly—and this could have had a beneficial impact on the more contentious matters—if necessary by India accepting the initial American suggestion that the restrictions strictly enforced at present under government orders should be incorporated into a law passed by Parliament. However, the American side seems to have a different agenda because during the "expert level" talks on export controls, held in Delhi at the end of March, the US delegation came forth with demands which were not just absurd but also insulting.

The requirements of the London-based Nuclear Suppliers' Group (NSG), the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), the Australian List and so on, the Americans demanded, be included in the Indian law without any of the rights and privileges available to members of these regimes being extended to India. Why? Because, the US in Talbott's words, "cannot concede, even by implication, that India is a nuclear weapon state in the meaning of the NPT." In other words, since India cannot be admitted to the Nuclear Club (never mind the Indian nuclear arsenal which will not disappear) it must stand at the club's gates, obey all the club's rules but get none of the rights of the members in good standing. Also there seems to have been a suggestion that India's observance of agreed restrictions should be subject to international monitoring. Can affrontery go farther than that?

No Indian government willing even to consider these demands can survive. Especially because at a time when the US is pretending (falsely, according to several members of a US Congressional delegation, headed by Richard Gephardt,

also in Delhi at the time of the tarnished talks) that Chinese transference of nuclear and missile technology and materials has ended, there is not the slightest danger of any leakage of nuclear technology from India.

Why then is the US trying to create a problem where none exists? Probably the hardliners in Washington feel encouraged by their success in making the Vajpayee government postpone not once but twice the testfiring of Agni-II that is vital if India has to have a credible nuclear deterrent worth the name.



Jaswant Singh (right) and Strobe Talbott

The American side seems to have a different agenda because during the "expert level" talks on export controls, held in Delhi at the end of March, the US delegation came forth with demands which were not just absurd but also insulting

They may be thinking that pressure will work across the board.

However, as so often and in so many different places, the Americans may be overreaching themselves. A key issue in the Delhi-Washington dialogue is the signing of the CTBT. Some progress was being made in that direction. This has now been put into jeopardy. For, the rather widespread opposition to signing this treaty any time before September or even afterwards has begun to escalate and can soon become formidable.

The crowning irony could, of course, be that the India-America dialogue on the CTBT might become irrelevant. Thanks to the NATO aggression against Yugoslavia, the CTBT might be killed by the Russian Duma rather than the Indian Parliament or even the US Senate. •

*Uncontrolled import
of the Chinese variety
may wipe out the
domestic silk industry*

Lingaraju Doddanahalli is a worried man. He had come to auction silk cocoons at the Ramanagara cocoon market, but realised soon enough that his produce will not fetch him the expected amount. "I have brought 300 kg of these," he says, absent-mindedly fingering the cocoons. "I have no option but to sell at whatever price I get. But if the prices fall any more, I am sunk."

His is just one worried face in a sea of dejected ones these days in this dusty little town called Ramanagara, better known as 'silky city'. Located roughly 70 km from Bangalore, Ramnagara is the nerve centre of all silk rearing and

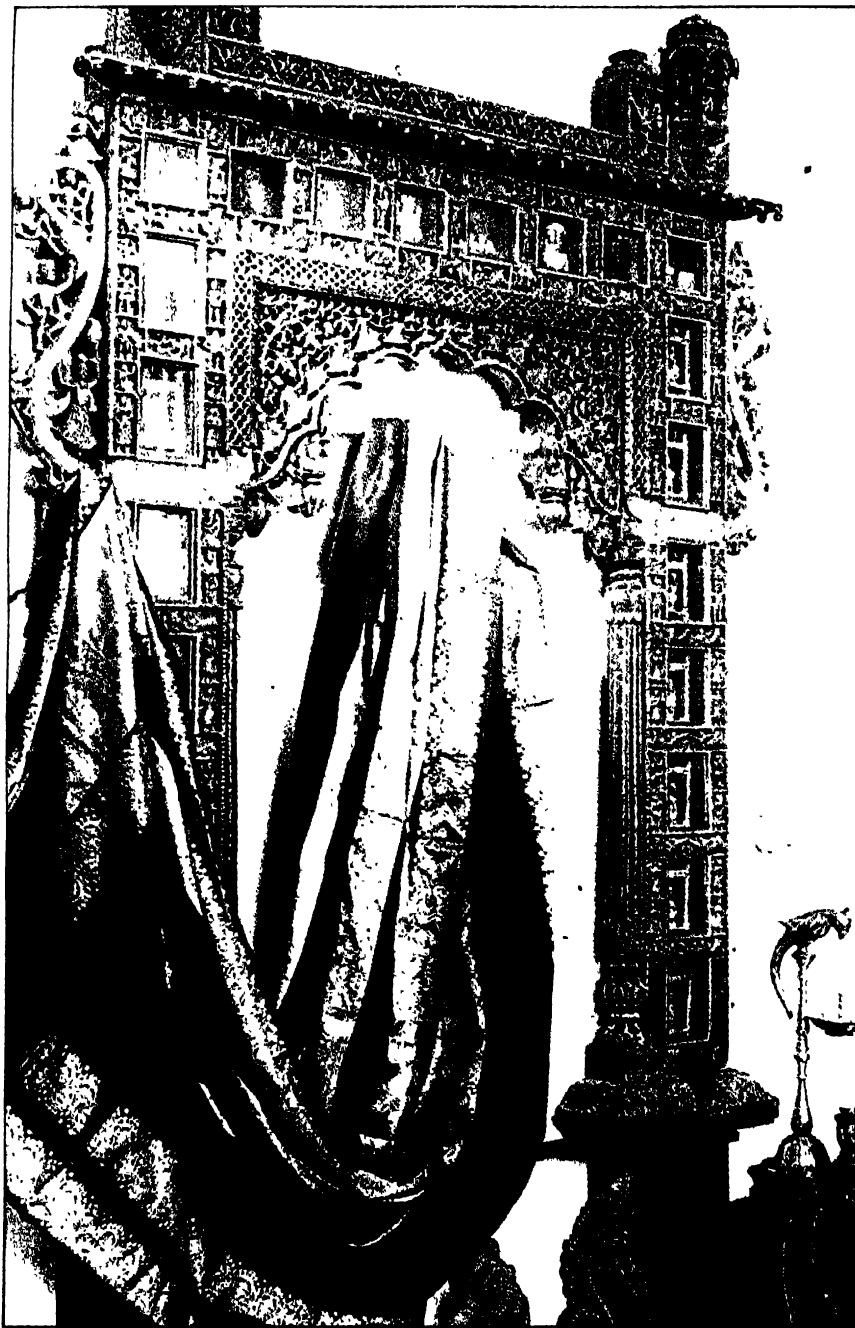
Last October, the central commerce ministry issued a special licence, allowing import of Chinese silk. The price of the domestic produce is going down alarmingly since then

trading in the country and is home to the largest silk cocoon market in Asia.

If Lingaraju is worried, P.C. Raju — whose family has been into silk cultivation for more than three generations — is very angry. "If the situation continues like this, we silk farmers will go on a rampage," he threatens. "Two days ago, I sold at Rs 139 per kg, today, I got only Rs 120. For 68 kg, I made a loss of Rs 800, that is a loss my pocket cannot bear."

"The farmers are a worried lot since silk rates have been slowly falling over

HANGING



the last couple of weeks," explains K. Ravindranath, an assistant director of the sericulture department. "Everyday, silk is selling at Rs 5-6 less than it did the previous day."

One doesn't have to dig too far to find

why silk cultivators are having a difficult time. Ever since the central commerce ministry headed by Ramakrishna Hegde decided last October to allow import of raw silk from China, the prices have registered a decline. Many fear that

BY A THREAD



Farmers rearing silkworms

once Chinese silk floods the Indian market, the domestic industry will die a natural death.

Over the last three months, there has been appeals and agitations in Karnataka, the largest silk-producing state in India, demanding that the special import licence (SIL) granted to import Chinese raw silk be withdrawn. So much so that one such agitation, in February, ended with some irate farmers stoning Ramakrishna Hegde's house in Bangalore.

It was like being let down by 'one of our own'. Besides, silk farmers of Karnataka contend that Hegde "has not really bothered to listen to" them. "We don't know how to explain to him that millions of people will be on the streets

**Earlier, China
dumped raw silk at
low costs in Japan
and ensured that the
sericulture industry
in that country was
wiped out. Possibly,
they have similar
plans about India**

because an entire industry is going to be wiped out," rues Y.K. Ramaiah, who is spearheading the agitation.

Hegde has tried to justify import of raw silk from China, saying it would help weavers who are facing a shortage of silk and would also contain smuggling of raw silk into the country. He has also said that the policy would be withdrawn if he was convinced that the import policy harmed the interests of the domestic industry.

The silk industry involves a range of specialised activities. Manufacturers and farmers are at either ends of the spectrum. In between are innumerable others like reelers, twistors, weavers, etc. Each group has its own vested interest and is either supporting or protesting

Hegde's policy of importing Chinese silk.

China, which produces about 70,000 metric tonnes of raw silk per year, is the biggest silk producer in the world. India is the second largest, producing about 14,000 metric tonnes. The main difference is that while China uses only 10 per cent of its total production and exports the rest, India consumes the entire domestic produce.

But what is really pertinent is the price difference. In communist China, it costs less than Rs 70 to produce a kg of silk cocoons, and about Rs 800 for a kg of raw silk. Even when the duty is added, the import of one kg of raw silk from China costs about Rs 1,000 to Rs 1,100. In comparison, in India, it costs about Rs 120 to produce a kg of cocoons, and about Rs 1,500 for a kg of



Deve Gowda: took out a rally to protest Hegde's import policy



Ramakrishna Hegde: alleged that Deve Gowda was behind the attacks on his house

raw silk.

"Obviously, it will make sense for silk manufacturers to opt for the cheaper imported Chinese silk rather than the costlier Indian silk," points out Ramachandra Gowda, a silk seed manufacturer. "This way the domestic sericulture industry, on which millions of people are dependent, will be strangled to death."

The joint action committee formed against the policy to import raw silk has strong reservations about China's policy. The committee points out that China is presently selling raw silk to India at the rate of 20 dollars per kg while it sells the same to Japan at 40 dollars a kg.

**Central commerce minister
Ramakrishna Hegde
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smuggling of raw silk**

"Why should China be showing so much consideration for India," asks Gowda. "Because it is their strategy. Earlier, it dumped raw silk at low costs in Japan and ensured that the sericulture industry in that country was wiped out. Now, they are the sole suppliers to Japan. They are adopting the same strategy towards India. Once their silk comes in, the domestic silk industry will be throttled to death and we will have to necessarily depend on China to meet our needs."

They also point out that China offers good prices to Indian silk waste exporters, creating an artificial scarcity in the market so that large mills which use such wastes to manufacture silk materials will pressurise the government to import Chinese raw silk.

The committee fears that once the Indian silk industry collapses, China will not only establish its hegemony over the world's silk trade, but also change its stance. "Later, don't be surprised if China starts selling the same silk to India at treble the amount it is now selling it at. Our short term vision now will make us pay up huge amounts in the long run," says Ramaiah.

Of the estimated 65 lakh farmers-cum-rearers involved in the sericulture industry across the country, about 45,00,000 are in Karnataka alone. The domestic silk industry involves more than six million people, if one includes silkwork seed producers, reelers, twistors, weavers, hand-spinners of silk waste and traders. In terms of money,

the silk industry earns farmers Rs 900 crore every year and the government a revenue of more than Rs 15 crore.

Despite these staggering statistics, neither a major political party nor a leader with clout has taken up the issue. Instead, they have only used it as a whip to settle personal scores. When Hegde's house was attacked, he alleged Deve Gowda was behind it. In retaliation, Gowda organised a rally in Bangalore against Hegde's policy. J.H. Patel's somnolent government has done precious little besides writing discontented letters to the central textiles and commerce ministries.

With the domestic demand for silk steadily increasing at the rate of 12 per cent per year and the supply failing to

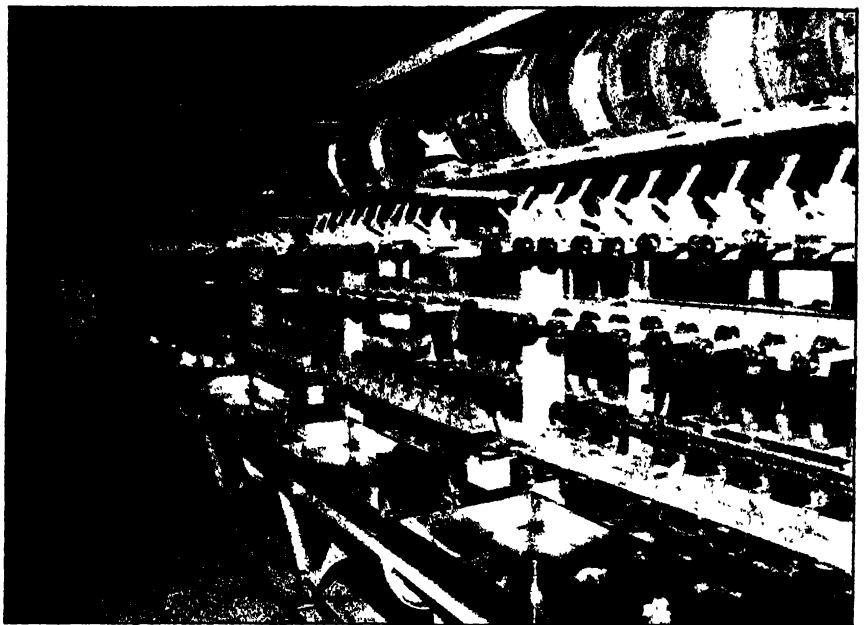


Reeled silk threads

keep pace with the demand, there seems to be a genuine shortage. According to one statistic from the central silk board, the shortage is around 24,000 metric tonnes.

The central silk board has been introducing different strains of silkworms, to cope with the demand. But, as R.B. Agawane, commissioner for sericulture development, Karnataka, points out, the production of silk with these new strains of worms still works out costlier than the import of Chinese silk.

Surprisingly, one of the segments of the silk industry which is supporting the import of Chinese silk are the handloom silk sari manufacturers. N. Ravikumar, a silk sari trader in the famous Kanchipuram, says that nothing about the famous



A silk reeling and spinning centre

The shortage of silk (24,000 metric tonnes per year) is being faced mostly by powerlooms, many of which have been forced to close shop because of the scarcity

temple saris from the south will change because this sector will still depend on the domestically-grown silk. Yet, he supports importing Chinese raw silk.

The reason is not hard to find. As B. Subramaniam, secretary of the Kanchipuram Silk Sari Manufacturers Association says: "We had taken our own delegation to Delhi to present our case. Yes, we don't need Chinese silk for our products, but its import would help us. Because it will meet the needs of the powerloom sector and take the pressure off the domestic silk which we need in our handlooms."

Clearly, the shortage of silk is being faced mostly by the powerlooms, many of which have been forced to close shop due to the scarcity. And if the country is

expected to achieve its silk textile export targets, these mills need raw material. It is no wonder then that the textile minister, Kanshi Ram Rana, insists that the commerce ministry allow the import of Chinese silk.

"I agree that if there is a genuine shortage of raw silk being faced by the powerlooms, then it should be imported. After all the looms provide jobs to a number of people who have to earn a living too," says Ramachandra Gowda. "But no effort has ever been made to study the kind of gap between supply and demand for raw silk and how much needs to be imported. What we are saying is that an uncontrolled import of silk will only destroy the domestic industry and render millions jobless."

Those protesting the import policy are acutely aware that once the WTO agreement to which India is a signatory come into effect in 2005, there is no way the import of Chinese silk can be stopped. "What we are saying is that let's make optimum use of the remaining time to strengthen our domestic industry," says Gowda. "The government is prematurely killing the industry."

With so many sections of the silk industry pitted against one another, Agawane says the only way it can be sorted out is through a holistic approach to the entire issue.

The question is: will the state and central governments, and especially Hegde, be able to rise up to that task? •

Gauri Lankesh/Bangalore

Carrying curry to Southall

CHOR BIZARRE



SHRABANI BASU'S BOOK DESCRIBES HOW THE CURRY CRAZE HAS

Curry is to Brits what wine and cheese are to the French...If indeed there was such a time when the sun never set on the British Empire, the roles are reversed now. The island-nation of 60 million appears to have been conquered by the curry

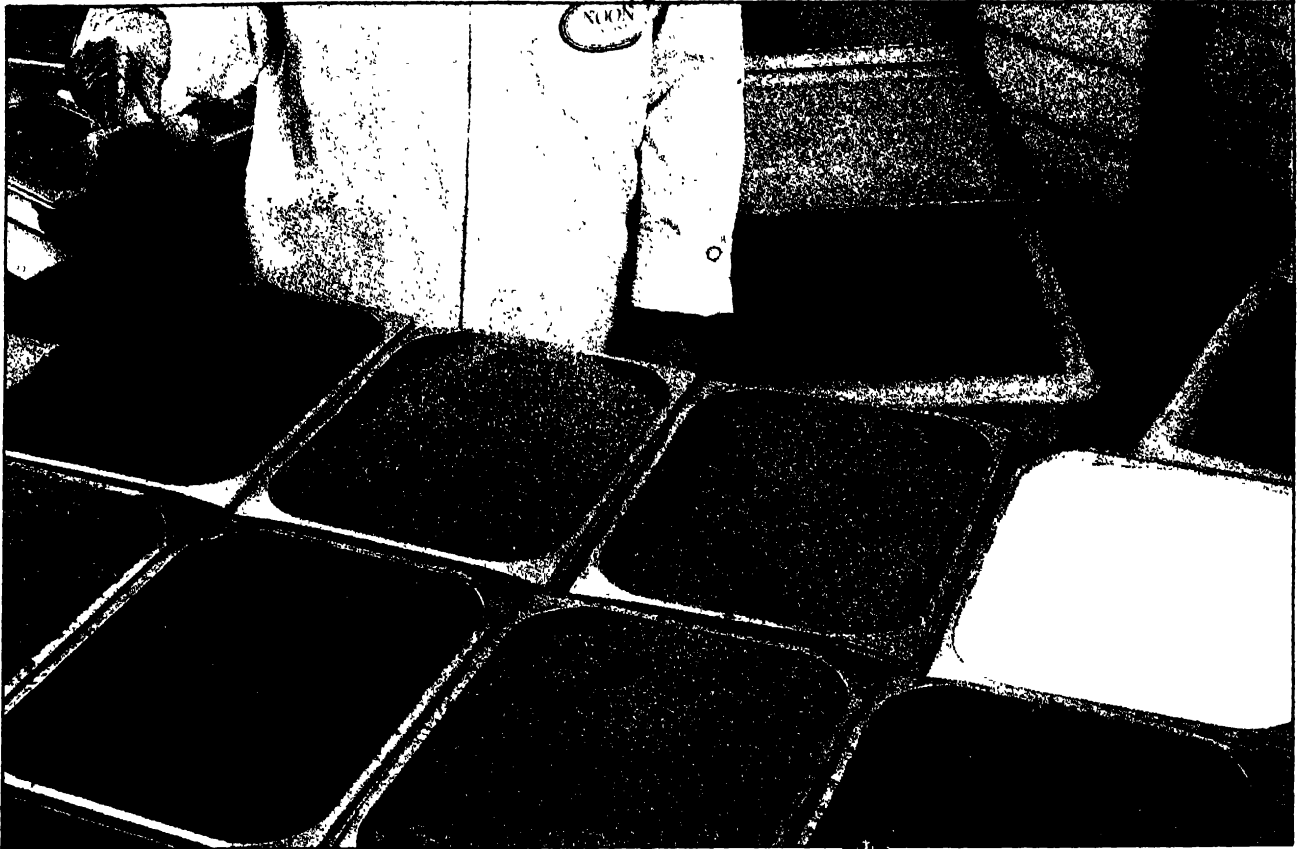
Every high street has one, even the remotest villages and islands have one, and most people eat in one, at least once a week. As curry becomes Britain's favourite dish, Indian restaurants have spread across the length and breadth of the country, proving that a little bit of curry powder goes a long way.

While Britain gave India all things English, from cricket to railways, education and law, only one thing travelled back with some significance from India to Britain: it was the curry.

Indian food has changed the way Britons eat, cook and entertain. It is on supermarket shelves, in pubs and in sandwich fillings. Over the years, it has evolved, becoming more specialised and authentic, and Indian restaurants are now competing with up-market French restaurants.

Indian food has created millionaires, it has been served in the House of Commons and many a Royal has enjoyed nibbling a chicken tikka.

*As Britons consume their rogan josh and lamb madras with enthusiasm, **CURRY IN THE CROWN** looks at the story of Indian food in Britain from its humble beginnings to its present status as the people's favourite food.*



TAKEN BRITAIN BY STORM. AN EXTRACT

It was 9.30 am and London's Waterloo Station was a sea of English fans waiting to catch the Eurostar to Paris. They carried familiar flags — the flag of St George — with its red crosses on white. Their excited faces too were painted in the same red and white. But the song they sang had a strange refrain.

And it sounded like 'vindaloo'.

The song went like this:

Where on earth are you from? We're from Eng-erland

Me and me mum and me dad and me gran

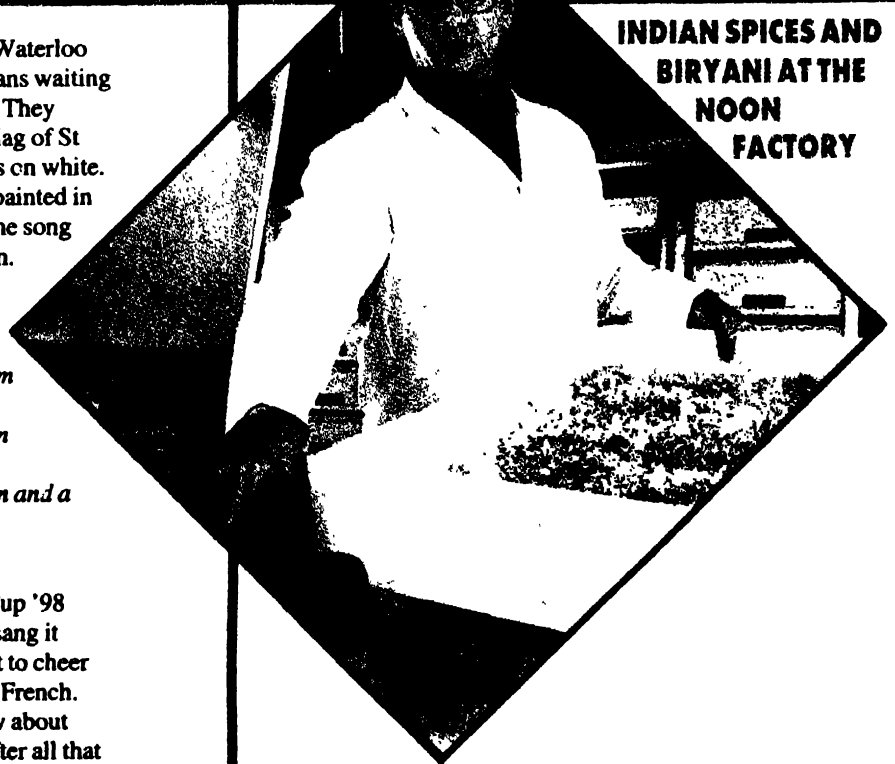
We're off to Waterloo

Me and me mum and me dad and me gran and a bucket

Of vindaloo.

It was the unofficial England World Cup '98 football anthem, *Vindaloo*, and the fans sang it lustily as they journeyed to the Continent to cheer their side, much to the amusement of the French.

But then, what would the French know about vindaloo? Perhaps it wasn't so strange after all that



**INDIAN SPICES AND
BIRYANI AT THE
NOON
FACTORY**

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New Delhi or the Taj Mahal is by bus

**PARMINDER SINGH,
ALIAS PELE, AT HIS BALTI PUB**



the English were singing a song about Indian curry at the World Cup. For if there was one thing this sea of painted faces had in common, apart from their devotion to English football, it has to be their fanatical love of curry. "It's an urban hymn and an anthem for life which we hope will capture the mood of the nation," said Alex James, bass player of the pop group, Blur, who had recorded a hit single with actor Keith Allen and award-winning artist, Damien Hirst.

That may be overstating things a bit, but curry is to Brits what wine and cheese are to the French. And if football is a way of life, so to these fans was curry. To Hirst, Allen and James, the song represented multicultural, modern Britain (which is a bit ironical, actually, given that the terraces of England's football grounds are a favourite hunting ground for racists). Expectedly, *Vindaloo*, the pop song, shot to number one on the charts. And Britain's favourite department store, Marks and Spencer, laid out a vindaloo ready-meal range in full style. It was football season after all.

More like curry season really...England didn't get into the finals, but what of it. The *Vindaloo* trio plan a whole new album for curry-mad Brits, with numbers that will be called *Korma Kameleon* and *Poppadom Preach*. Undeterred by losses and riots (or perhaps because of them), a group of ten

It seems British fish too are developing a taste for the stuff!

Fisherman Phil Wilding won an angling competition by flavouring his maggots with curry powder



THE OLD VEERASWAMY OPENED IN 1926

Scottish fans in Bordeaux became so homesick for their curry, they ordered a 1,400-pound Indian takeaway from a restaurant at Bournemouth in south-east England. The food was specially flown out to Bordeaux in time for a Scotland-Norway match. For its well-publicised pains, The Eye Of The Tiger restaurant, which regularly flies out orders of Indian meals around the world, charged a hefty 600 pounds for the food and 800 pounds for the delivery by chartered plane.

To many Indians, and others, this British dedication to curry may appear somewhat surprising. But the nation once ridiculed for its fondness for fish and chips and — on Sundays only — ‘meat and three vegs’ seems at the turn of the century to be in a hurry to make up for the lost time in savouring gastronomic delights. And topping the foodies’ charts is the curry.

Perhaps the most baffled by this obsession is the first-time Indian visitor to the British Isles. For a start, which Indian has ever used the word ‘curry’ to describe Indian food? There is the north Indian yoghurt-based preparation called *karhi* and there is the fragrant herb called ‘curry leaf’ — the favourite of south Indians. But there is nothing in India quite as universal as the British curry.

In Britain, the humble curry is acknowledged — officially — as the most popular food. Apparently, Brits simply can’t have enough of spice. A 1997 Gallup poll of British taste buds showed that curry was beyond doubt the nation’s favourite food with over a quarter of Britons eating it at least once a week. Gallup concluded that Britain was becoming a nation of ‘curryholics’. If indeed there was such a time when the sun never set on the British Empire,



THE NEW VEERASWAMY OF 1997



THE BALLYGRANT INN

THE BOMBAY BRASSERIE



LA PORTE DES INDES



the roles are reversed now. From John O'Groats on the edge of the northern province of Scotland to windswept Land's End in England's southern tip, an island-nation of 60 million appears to have been conquered by the curry. The United Kingdom's eating habits have been changed forever.

It's even a leveller of sorts. What used to be a meal for the discerning middle classes, those knowing about India and world food, has now become a household name, transcending all classes. Even the toughest, tattooed football fan — with a couple of pints of lager in his belly — returning home from cheering his football team at Wembley Stadium knows his *rogan josh* from his *lamb Madras* and will not hesitate to point it out if the local Karahi King serves him otherwise.

Currymania has even been made official by the British Tourist Authority. Tourist guides boldly state that curry is the number one British dish, and if you thought it was, well, fish and chips, you have a 'misplaced sense of island tradition'. In trying to erase some of the stereotypical images of the country as one with castles, foggy skies and divorcing royalty, the Tourist Authority has chosen the hot curry to promote cool Britannia. Exciting and contemporary Britain is "turning into a nation of curryholics", says the guide. "Actress and curry guru Madhur Jaffrey has become the Mrs

Beaton [the 19th-century grand dame of cookery and household management] of the 1990s."

Alongside, the British government has recognised the importance of curry as part of the British diet. In a recent statement following the scare that the Millennium Bug would hit supplies of essential items as Britons entered Year 2000, the head of the government's Millennium Bug Task Force Action 2000 asked citizens to stock up with at least two weeks' supplies before the turn of the century. On Gwyneth Flower's official list of essential items, which will be available to all citizens in mid-1999 are: "Tins, dried foods and grain, cans of soup, *half-a-dozen curries*, tuna and packets of biscuits and long-life milk."

The message is clear — if essential services are going to be disrupted, don't get caught without your curry.

The times, it seems, are truly changing for the old cod or haddock wrapped up in white paper, doused with salt and vinegar and served with a heap of greasy chips. The once-popular

neighbourhood 'chippie' that — more than any other institution — symbolised all things British is slowly becoming a thing of the past. The tandoori chicken has arrived.

The curryholistic image of Britons is no exaggeration. There are more than 8,000 Indian restaurants in Britain — up from 3,500 in 1982 — visited by two million people each week. Each year, 2 billion pounds are spent in Indian restaurants — about 70 pounds per second. Indian restaurants are the fastest growing in the restaurant business and have even survived the mid-Nineties' recession. By the end of the decade their numbers are likely to reach 10,000.

Some curry-watchers hold that there are now more Indian restaurants in Britain than in New Delhi and Bombay put together, for what such comparisons are worth, and that London may soon become the curry capital of the world.

A case of wishful thinking? Not necessarily. A survey by Mintel in 1994 showed that there was nothing the British liked doing better than curling up in front of the television with a dish of hot Indian curry. And they did not just depend on restaurants to serve them either. The curry had so wooed the English palate that Brits were now spending most of their grocery bills on buying Indian spices, curry pastes and chilled meals, according to the survey.

In the same year, *Marketing* magazine's annual survey of the biggest brands in Britain named Pataks — the popular manufacturers of Indian pickles and pastes — as the fastest growing brand with 92 per cent growth in retail sales in 1993. In second place with 71 per cent was Always sanitary towels manufactured by Procter & Gamble, and third was Eternity, Calvin Klein's famed fragrance for men with 45 per cent growth. "It came as something of a shock to find our fastest growing brand is owned not by a multinational with an advertising budget to match but by a family-owned foods company," the magazine wrote. It was a veritable coup for proprietors Kirit and Meena Pathak — they had stumped British industry with a well-delivered spice-googly.

In tandem, Britain has seen a huge surge in ready-chilled or frozen meals stocked in supermarkets. Marks and Spencer, the leading department store with a very popular food section, serves 26 types of Indian dishes and says any new dish is quickly snapped up by customers. The chain sells 18 tonnes of *chicken tikka masala* each week, confirming it to be Britain's favourite Indian meal (rare though this recipe is in India itself, being the quintessential 'British curry'). Britons eat ten packs of Marks and Spencer curry every minute of the day — enough portions in a year to give one to each of the nine million people who live in Bombay.



ADVERTISEMENTS FOR COBRA BEER

**CYRUS TODIWALA
OF CAFE SPICE
(NAMASTE)**





BASMATI RICE BEING SOLD

Britain's most exclusive department store, Harrods, lays on the curry heavily. The famed Harrods Food Hall, which is every food lover's delight, has a wide range of Indian meals which are sold loose by weight.

A few miles away from Harrods is the elegant Fortnum and Mason, the exclusive food store in Piccadilly, famous for its afternoon teas. Stroll into it and on its well-stocked shelves you will see a range of tandoori pastes and pickles. Fortnum and Mason do their own brand of vindaloo, described as Indian curry paste, in both medium and hot flavours. There is also a Fortnum and Mason Madras curry powder, which comes in a 'mild' version suitable for the English palate. Chutneys, poppadums and elegant small tins of basmati rice form part of the exotic Indian selection.



TONY AND CHERIE BLAIR

Those who won't cook it, just heat it and eat it, and those who don't heat it, simply order a meal from takeaways — sort of curry fast-food counters. Many are the stories of the curryholic who would do anything for his curry. Indeed, a road accident victim in northern England famously asked bemused onlookers for a curry before he asked for an ambulance. Magistrates in the city of York heard how the first words of Derek Bond, upon regaining consciousness after being hit by a speeding car, were: "Phone my wife and tell her to keep my curry warm." He had been on his way home from work and Mrs Bond evidently had a hot curry waiting for him.

This Bond sure loved his curry, but radio DJ Lisa l'Anson was not far behind, having once paid 1,525 pounds to have a curry flown to Miami after discovering that Indian food was unavailable there.

In fact, things look so rosy for curry-makers, Mustapha Aolad of the Eye Of The Tiger runs a flying curry service (Aolad is a qualified pilot from Bangladesh) to places as far off as Sydney, New York and Tokyo. He is planning a restaurant in the sky in a Boeing 707, so that diners looking for the ultimate curry experience can fly over the Big Ben and London by night while tucking into *chicken Madras* and *prawn vindaloo*.

In addition to humans, it seems British fish too are developing a taste for the stuff! Fisherman Phil Wilding won an angling competition by flavouring his maggots with curry powder. The man claims the hapless fish simply could not resist the 'gorgeous smell' wafting from his bait.



SOHO SPICE

Curry is flavouring politics in Britain too — the Indo-British Parliamentary Group is called the Curry Club.

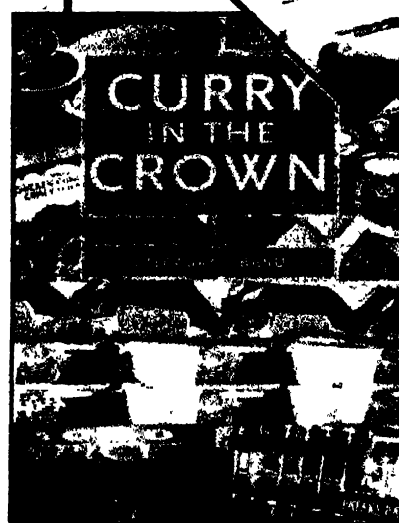
Comprising some 60 British MPs with an interest in India, it is jointly headed by a member of the ruling party in Britain and the Indian High Commissioner, and meets over working curry lunches. Usually held at the Indian High Commission or the High Commissioner's residence, the sit-down lunch is always a curry. Often an Indian dignitary who is passing through is invited. In recent years, former Indian Prime Ministers P.V. Narasimha Rao and V.P. Singh have attended Curry Club do's and issues ranging from Kashmir to foreign investment have been discussed over delectable kebabs, tikkas and *rogan josh*.

If the way to an Englishman's heart is through a curry, then British politicians have surely been wooed with a fair share of curry diplomacy. But why stop at MPs? Signs are curry has its fans at the highest level of the British political establishment.

On the opening day of the Labour Party's annual conference in September 1998, Prime Minister Tony Blair and his wife Cherie decided on an Indian takeaway. As Tony calmed the nerves of the party faithfuls worried about the state of the economy, Cherie popped over to the local Sunam Tandoori and ordered a meal of poppadums, *chicken tikka masala*, *lamb Madras*, some vegetables and *daal* for 18 people in Tony's entourage. In true, no-nonsense, takeaway-style, the bill was marked 'For Mr Blair' and came to only 185 pounds, which shows that when it comes to value for money there's no beating a curry. •



CAFE SPICE
(NAMASTE)



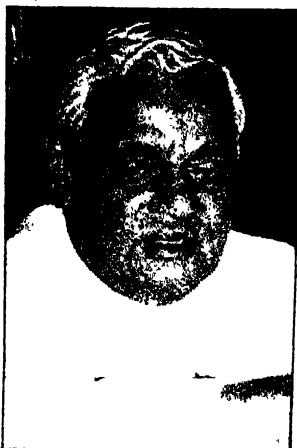
BOOK DETAILS

Author: Shrabani Basu

Published by: HarperCollins
Publishers India

Price: Rs 195

THE VERSATILITY BUG INFECTS OUR POLITICIANS TOO.



Atal Behari Vajpayee: Prime Minister. Poet-philosopher who cooks for fun



Balram Jakhar: The ex-Lok Sabha Speaker grows exotic stuff in his garden



Jaya Jaitly: Samata Party general secretary. Superb mimic. Says it runs in the family



Najma Heptullah: Deputy chairperson of the Rajya Sabha. Also a good mimic

CONCLUSION: ...And we thought them unidimensional and uninteresting. Watch this space for

WHAT THE ARTIST SAYS

M.F. HUSAIN is in the news again, this time for his painting *Violence* which, at 40 feet, is his biggest work yet.

Q: Why the theme on violence?

A: It's on the universal phenomenon of violence. The charred chairs arranged in a row signifies authority. But it's not a comment on any particular period of history or government. I made this painting in 1992, much before the Babri Masjid demolition and the communal carnage thereafter.

Q: Does the size signify anything?

A: Violence has always been associated with the history of mankind. With the scale and grandeur of the painting, I wanted to capture the timelessness of the theme.

Q: Critics have drawn parallels with Picasso's *Guernica*.

A: That particular painting by Picasso was on the Spanish Civil War. My work doesn't relate to any particular event. I guess, critics need to relate to something. When my short film *Of Gods And Man* on the erotic sculptures of Nepal was screened in Germany, critics there compared it with Picasso's work. That's how the media conditions people's minds.

Q: *Violence* was made seven years back. Why is it on exhibition now?

A: It was first exhibited in Delhi's National Modern Gallery in October 1992. But there was no mention about it then. Now I have got the chance to display it as part of my exhibition *Darkness at Noon*.

Interviewed by Kahlil Walle/Bombay



It's not only the dazzling stars of our entertainment world; some of our politicians are also multifaceted types. Taking a closer look at their extra-professional talents.



Giridhar Gamang: Low-profile Orissa CM. Plays tribal musical instruments

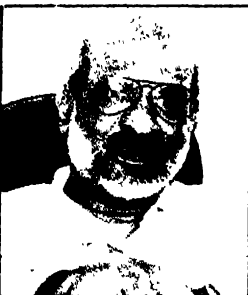


Vishwanath Pratap Singh: Ex-Prime Minister. Now paints and writes poetry

ore information on our politicians

KINDRED SOULS

Mohan Guruswamy is embarking on a career in what he does best: writing fiction. And he is collaborating with Suhasini Mulay



Where's the catch?

Depends on how you look at it. (Maybe, there isn't any catch.) The two are scripting a serial for Zee on corruption, society and politics

Their claim to fame (or notoriety)

Guruswamy: he is the recently-sacked adviser to the finance ministry

Mulay: she is the *Bhuvan Shome* girl

It's a harmonic tie-up?

Seems to be. Guruswamy is still smarting from his inglorious exit. Mulay's obsessed with corruption in public life. Incidentally, *Bhuvan Shome* was also about corruption.

PREDICTION: Should be an eventful tie-up. Guruswamy will write about stealing; but never about steel.



OUT OF RHYTHM

We know it's not nice to be mean or unkind or to mock somebody's effort to be creative. Especially when someone is trying hard to get back into the limelight. Unfortunately, nasty, low-minded mockery sometimes wells up from within beyond our control because some people never ever seem to realise that flop returns are really counter-productive. After her album *No Vacancy* sank incognito, Mandakini, who once had fans sizzling in their seats, is out with her next, *Shambala*. Does the title make any sense? Can't say it does. Nor do the numbers.

GENTLE MEMORIES

When somebody calls you narcissistic, then goes a step further saying that you are incapable of loving, more often than not you'd rasp back an answer. **Kabir Bedi** didn't. It hurt him but he decided to shrug the epithets off when they came out in Shobha De's bare-all book *Selective Memories*. He also vowed not to hurt anybody when he wrote his memoirs and now the time's come to show how. Bedi's autobiography, which is making a slow progress, is to be released sometime this year. He says it will be gentle and "give an insight into my life". Should be a thriller.



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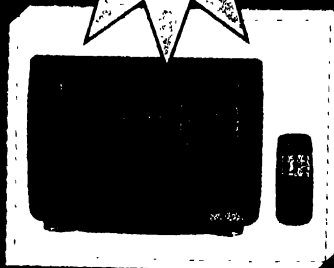
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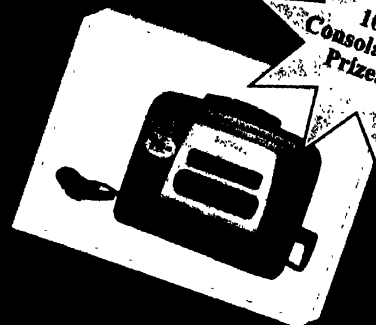
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Small talk

Trivial issues dominate the agenda in Parliament and Assemblies



It seems there is a great dearth of good parliamentarians and parliamentary issues as well. It has been noticed during the last few years that serious debates do not take place in Parliament and state Assemblies. Small issues are being raised for cheap publicity and as a result, precious time is being wasted.

For example, one full day was wasted in the Delhi Assembly on an irrelevant issue that Sheila Dikshit cut her birthday cake on which the Indian map was carved. Dikshit explained in detail that the map was carved on the corner of the cake and she did not cut that. But the Opposition would not listen.

Similarly, in Uttar Pradesh on the same day the Opposition did not allow the Assembly to function. The reason being that an Indian map was printed wrongly in an Intermediate question paper. It was a clerical mistake of the UP Education Board and the action should be taken against the officials concerned. These issues are not of the nature that the resignations of Sheila Dikshit and Kalyan Singh should be sought.

The Tamil Nadu Assembly was supposed to discuss important issues such as the state's financial crisis, power generation and illegal immigrants during the current session. But, the whole focus of the House was on an MLA who came in wearing helmet and bulletproof jacket.

The media also gave so much importance to this incident that the story appeared throughout the country. Now everybody knows that violence is common in state Assemblies and if it has to be restricted there should be a simple law that members indulging in violence will lose their membership.

Instead of debating this provision, members are getting into gimmicks by wearing helmets and making a mockery of themselves. Can there be more violence than what had happened in Uttar Pradesh when Kalyan Singh had taken

over? I have an eyewitness account as I was sitting in the Governor's gallery. Everybody knows who had instigated the violence. The Speaker has received the inquiry commission's report, but nobody has lost the membership of the House. And this inaction encourages hooligans to promote violence in legislatures.

Also it is a pity that the standard and

Atal Behari Vajpayee, L.K. Advani, Somnath Chatterjee, Indrajit Gupta, P. Shiv Shankar, Pranab Mukherjee, Manmohan Singh, Sushma Swaraj, Pramod Mahajan, Uma Bharati, Nitish Kumar, George Fernandes, Arun Shourie, Narendra Mohan, Madhavrao Scindia, Arif Mohammad Khan, Nirmal Mukherjee, etc.

But owing to the pandemonium either



One full day was wasted in the Delhi Assembly on an irrelevant issue that Sheila Dikshit cut her birthday cake on which the Indian map was carved. Dikshit tried to explain but the Opposition would not listen

level of discussion are gradually going down in Parliament. The days of Jawaharlal Nehru, Ram Manohar Lohia, Jyotirmoy Basu, Madhu Limaye, Piloo Mody, H.R. Gokhale, Nath Pai, Shamim Ahmed Shamim, H.N. Bahuguna, Hiren Mukherjee, Bhupesh Gupta are only a matter of history now. They have been replaced by people like Laloo Prasad Yadav, Pappu Yadav, Kali Pandey, Ratnakar Pandey, Phoolan Devi, Mohammad Tasleemuddin, Akbar Ahmed 'Dumpy', Brij Bhushan Singh, Lal Bihari Tiwari, etc.

We still have some good speakers like

they do not have the time or the opportunity to speak. Most of the time the House is adjourned on small and irrelevant issues. Vote politics is dominating the agenda of Parliament than the politics of national interest.

Every member had taken the pledge during the special session in the 50th year of Independence that issues of national importance like population control, national security, economic development, electoral reforms, elimination of corruption, etc., will be addressed to. Unfortunately, no progress has been made on these issues. •



CHAMOLI

Minutes after the 6.8 magnitude earthquake hit Chamoli in Uttar Pradesh on 28 March, residents in Delhi rushed out of their houses, all dishevelled and scared. It was 12.40 in the morning and Delhi was just going to sleep when the Chamoli quake hit them. It broke a few window panes, scared a lot of people but that was all.

Next time, Delhi might not be lucky. According to Dr J.G. Negi, emeritus scientist at the National Geophysical Research Institute (NGRI), "A channeling phenomenon has now been observed where seismic waves that travel to Delhi from other areas are suddenly amplified." And "if the past is any indication, a big one (more than 8 on the Richter) is expected in the western Himalayan region. Put together, they point to a grave situation," Negi added.

To get the perspective right, the Richter scale is a logarithmic scale i.e., an earthquake of intensity 8.6 would be about 10,000 times stronger than a quake of 6.6 on the Richter scale. If a 6.8 magnitude quake in Chamoli can shake up the capital, an earthquake of magnitude 8.6 could be disastrous for Delhi. Alluvial areas like the Trans-Yamuna region would be specially vulnerable when compared to Ridge areas that have a solid sediment foundation.

Future Shock

Threat of earthquakes looms large over India

And this is not the first time such a phenomenon has been observed. According to Dr Negi, such an amplification was also observed in the 1991 Uttarkashi earthquake (magnitude 6.6 on the Richter). The tremors travelling southward decreased to magnitude 4.0 by the time they reached the surrounding areas of Delhi. But in Delhi, they suddenly sprang up to 5.

In fact, Negi believes the first ever mention of such a phenomenon was in a paper (Smith 1948) published in the Asiatic Society of Bengal. It spoke of a quake in the Garhwal region of the Himalayas in which "whole villages per-

ished. Badrinath temple was severely damaged and the upper portion of the Qutub Minar was also destroyed". This is not unusual. Amplification has been observed in other parts of the world also. For instance, the Mexico quake of 1985 actually had its epicentre 500 kms away on the Pacific Coast. But the greatest damage was in Mexico city itself because almost the entire city is situated in a lake bed. Ten thousand people died at the time.

But if history repeats itself, as it does only too often in India, the government is unlikely to take note of this.



JABALPUR

After some quake or the other, the ISI issues codes of construction for different seismic zones. No one knows about them. It is unlikely that most people in the ISI remember it themselves.

After the Koyna disaster in 1967, there was much noise on how the myth had been shattered — the Deccan field was not seismically dead. Our earth scientists being the loudest on this point. But when the Latur quake happened in 1993, we were still shattering the same myth — our scientists included.

In fact, we are not even aware of our earthquake-prone status. The Himalayan region is the second-most seismically active region in the world. On the basis of number of quakes greater

Delhi shook with Chamoli and so everyone is worried. Like in the past, we are quite likely to forget the lessons of the Chamoli quake. To continue with the Mexico city example, that quake took place 15 years after it was predicted to happen. But the point is: it happened



UTTARKASHI

India's Trouble Spots

Almost the whole of India is seismically active

The north-west: Uttarkashi in Garhwal, Kangra in Himachal Pradesh and the Kashmir Valley — these areas in the north-west Himalayas are among the most earthquake-prone since stress points in these regions exist on a fault line.

The north-east: On an average 625 earthquakes from lesser to moderate intensity occur annually in this region. The north-east tends to have a 6.5 to 7.5 magnitude earthquake at least once every decade and an over 7.5 magnitude quake once every 50 years. Most of the quakes occur along the Dowki fault along the India-Burma border.



Bihar and the India-Nepal border: Bihar lies between Kashmir and Assam in the northern belt of India along the Himalayan boundary which is perched on a layer of rocks in motion. This makes it a very vulnerable region. The 1934 quake (magnitude 8.3) left 10,000 dead and in 1988 the Bihar quake jolted West Bengal, UP, MP, all of north-east and parts of neighbouring Bangladesh.

Central India and the Deccan: The Jabalpur quake was found to have its centre on the Son-Narmada linement zone, where a large and deep crystal fracture was detected. Besides, both Latur and Jabalpur quakes were caused due to tectonic movements of the earth and tectonics of any dimension are big trouble. The smug assumption that the Deccan shield is seismically dead now lies shattered.

The south: The Koyna disaster of 1967, followed by a 5.5 magnitude quake in the Bhadrachalam region of Andhra Pradesh and 20 years later, the Idduki tremors on 7 June, 1988, in Kerala have established the seismically active nature of the south. Though the earth showed no faults in these places, the quakes were believed to have been caused by rift zones, a factor to which sufficient attention has not been given while preparing India's seismic map. •

The Clouded Crystal

Why are scientists unable to predict earthquakes?

When a series of tremors that began on 26 September, 1997, killed 10 people, left 3,000 homeless, but most importantly for the Italians, severely damaged frescoes at the Basilica of St Francis of Assisi — their patron saint — almost all of Europe clamoured to know what had happened to promises of Earthquake prediction. There had been demands earlier too of course, but the 1997 Italian quakes had hit Europe where it hurt most — their precious medieval art. The destroyed frescoes for instance had been made by an artist called P. Cimabue who had inspired the Florentine School that ultimately produced Botticelli, Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci.

The answers weren't too encouraging. For years, a team of Western Europe, Russian, American, Chinese and Japanese scientists from various disciplines — seismologists, mathematicians, geologists, physicists and geophysicists — had been working on the problem. They claimed they could predict an earthquake within a radius of 3 to 400 kms in a time span of one-and-a-half-years. That doesn't sound very meaningful but by existing quake prediction standards it was incredible. *But* they had failed to predict the Italy quakes and till last heard of, the technique was still being tested.

The scenario is not very different in India except that we make predictions in terms of decades instead of years. Yet, after every earthquake in the country, newspapers are full of I-told-you-so scientists claiming they knew it would happen all along and no one paid attention to them. After the Latur quake that killed over 10,000 people we were told that there had been 1,200 minor tremors in the region just prior to the big one. An NGRI paper (National Geophysical Research Institute) is also believed to have mentioned the matter. After the Jabalpur quake some one spoke of a noticeable change in the thermal images of the area as seen in thermal infrared data of the earth. And so on.

But the fact of the matter is that geophysics — specially quake prediction — is essentially an empirical science. Even that large group of multi-disciplinary scientists in Europe was doing the same thing Indian scientists do. Only, at a more sophisticated level: they looked at high risk seismic areas around the globe; examined the pattern of past earthquakes and the symptoms that preceded them; and put them into a software programme using a complex series of equations. Then waited for the answer to pop out on the screen. The presumption being that if the earth behaved in one particular manner at one time, it would do so again.

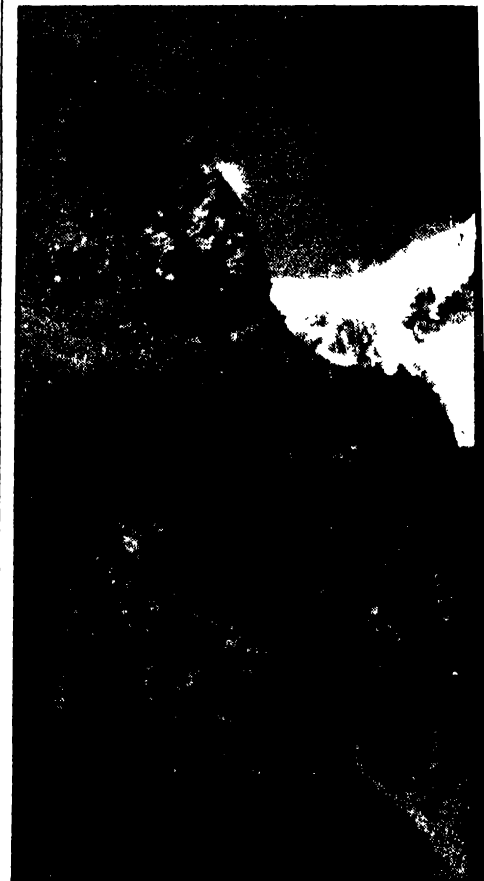
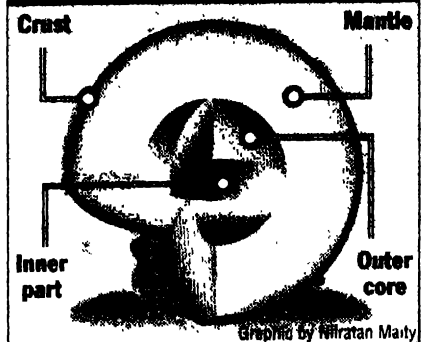
Simply put, it's something like this: if your child cries and then stamps his foot and screams loudly, you have a seismic or spoilt child. And the next time he cries and stamps his foot, it's a fair bet that he will also scream.

It's as empirical as that. Quake prediction only uses more parameters and more data but prediction centres all over the world — even in high-risk areas of Western America, China and Japan — are working more or less on the same principle.

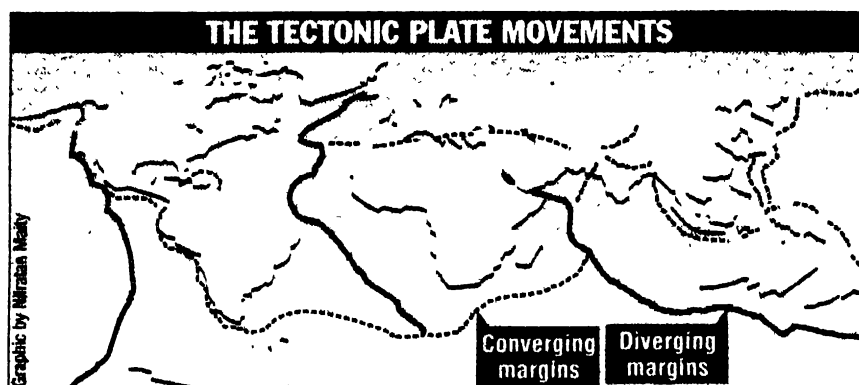
And even these predictions are more often than not, far off the mark. For instance, Gupta and Singh in a paper in 1986 studied the north-eastern region's seismicity since 1897 and predicted a 'Big One' (greater than 8 on the Richter) in 1990. It did not happen (thankfully). In another study, the Mexico quake that killed 10,000 people was predicted to happen in 1970. Instead, it happened 15 years later in 1985.

So far, attempts at more scientific or instrument-based predictions haven't got anywhere either. In Southern California — another high risk area — scientists have installed a network of digital seismometers beneath the surface. In addition to pinpointing the focus and epicentre of a quake — after the event — scientists say they may also be able to pick up approaching seismic waves from distant faults. But the warning they may be able to give soon-to-be hit residents: 15 to 30 seconds! ■

THE EARTH'S INTERIOR



The Himalayan region is the second most seismically active region in the world. On the basis of the number of quakes greater than magnitude 8 that have occurred, India is the third most threatened country in the world — next only to Japan and Mexico



than magnitude 8 that have occurred, India is the third most threatened country in the world — next only to Japan and Mexico.

We do not have any one agency responsible for continuously monitoring and reporting on seismic activity in India. Every institute in an extremely arbitrary manner dabbles in it — the Met department, the Geological Survey of India (GSI) and NGRI. No one has ultimate responsibility.

Nor is the scientific community doing very well. After every quake, dispute begins on where the epicentre of the quake was, what was its magnitude and most importantly, what was the reason for the quake. In fact, we don't even have a seismic map on which everyone agrees. Dr Krishna Brahman of NGRI has been pushing for indications of gravity anomalies and in a paper presented in 1989 he said, "Koyna, Bhatsa (both in Maharashtra) and Idukki (in Kerala) were glaring examples where due importance to gravity maps was not given." He also warned that the Sriharikota launching range was lying on a zone of gravitational fault — which means it was indubitably situated in a quake-prone area.

On the other hand, there are also attempts to make the establishment — whatever and wherever it might be — to realise the importance of rift valleys especially in the Deccan. Rifts are arrays of faults and they typically enclose a valley. The existence of these faults points to both volcanic and quake activity.

This laid-back attitude does not augur well for the to-be victims. There has been a spurt in seismic activity in India since 1988 and many seismologists, expect this to go on for another 50 years. And if the past is any indication, Big Ones (greater than 8 on the Richter) are expected both in the north-east and the western Himalayas. Dr Negi says another 6 to 6.5 magnitude quake is likely to hit the south of the Narmada, perhaps in the next couple of years. It looks like active times ahead.

Of course this could be a hysterical panic button. Delhi shook with Chamoli and so everyone is worried. Like in the past, we are quite likely to forget the lessons of the Chamoli quake. To continue with the Mexico city example, that quake took place 15 years after it was predicted to happen. But the point is: it happened. •

Sarita Rani/Hyderabad

THE LATUR LESSON

In Maharashtra, measures are being taken to combat future quakes

Thirtieth September, 1993. At 3.56 am, violent tremors shook the eastern districts of Latur and Osmanabad in Maharashtra. An earthquake measuring 6.4 on Richter scale lasted for barely 42 seconds but created havoc in the region: killing over 8,000 people and injuring 16,000. Nearly 52 villages were completely ruined and extensive damage was reported in over 1,200 villages in these two districts. Eleven other districts in the Marathwada region were ravaged. The total property loss was estimated at Rs 11,821 millions. Not to mention the trauma and tragedy borne by the surviving quake victims.

After five-and-a-half years, Latur and

Osmanabad districts are now on the road to recovery. Fifty two severely affected villages have been entirely relocated; *in situ* reconstruction of 22 villages is on its way to completion; and nearly 1.9 lakh partially damaged houses are almost repaired and retrofitted using earthquake-resistant technology. The Maharashtra Emergency Earthquake Rehabilitation Programme, claimed to be the largest in the world, undertaken by the state government in association with several NGOs and donor agencies will be completed by June 1999.

The surviving victims, too, seem to have shaken off the traumatic past and picked up the threads of their lives again. However, the fear of being wiped



Shelter Is The Key

How to make buildings quake-resistant

The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) has formulated a list of guidelines to be followed in the construction of buildings capable of weathering a quake.

As per BIS definition, earthen houses include constructions using clay mud lumps, unburnt clay brick, compacted soil in wood forms.

Suggestions made in case of mud houses:

• Whereas dry clay block is hard and strong in compression, water penetration makes it soft and weak, reducing its strength by 80 to 90 per

cent. This needs to be taken care of through waterproof mud-plastering.

• Buildings should be as light as possible and short in height. Roofs of buildings should in particular be short in height. Roofs of building should preferably be of light material like sheeting of any type. Heavy roofs consisting of wood joists and earth topping are dangerous. In case of thatched roof, water and fire proofing should be ensured by applying waterproof mud plaster.

• Since experience in high-intensity areas has shown vulnerability of two-

storeyed house, only one-storey construction should be adopted in highly seismic-prone zones.

• For better earthquake resistance, the building should have a simple rectangular plan and be symmetrical as far as possible about both the axis. The load bearing walls should run continuously in both directions. Large houses may have an inner courtyard for light and ventilation with proper drainage outlets, instead of having projections giving rise to L and T shaped plans.

• The purpose of plastering and paint-



ing is to give protection and durability to the walls and thatch roof. In dry areas, plastering based on natural additives (mud and straw and cow-dung are natural additives) can be used to increase the moisture resistance of the mud, thereby preventing occurrence of fissures during the drying process.

In case of brick buildings, the following suggestions have been made by the BIS:

- As in the case of earthen dwellings, here too the roofs and upper storeys of the buildings should be as light as

possible. As far as possible, all parts of the building should be tied together in such a manner that the building acts as one building.

- The building should have a simple rectangular plan. Buildings should be constructed to make them fire resistant. Stairs should be interconnected with adjacent floors and be provided with sliding joints at the stairs to eliminate bracing on the floors.

- Damp-proofing the building will ensure that the construction does not become weak. Use of water-proof

out in another earthquake still persists in their minds. In fact, even after their houses were relocated and reconstructed with earthquake-resistant technology, many villagers are scared of sleeping in them. "Only after our volunteers slept in them for over a week, did they agree to shift in," informs S.R. Selwine, chief zonal officer of CASA, who undertook the responsibility of relocating five villages.

Economic needs of the quake victims have also been taken care of. New farming equipments, wells and cattle have also been provided to the villagers by several NGOs. As Chandrakala Bhargava of Latur-based Nari Prabodhan Manch said, "Several social rehabilitation schemes like supporting 500 self-help groups of women, creation of village development fund, community centres for women, etc. have been undertaken. As a result, women have emerged more stronger and more aware of their rights. In fact, many women volunteered to participate in the Ration Kruti Samiti Morcha organised in Mumbai last month."

But one fallout of the earthquake rehabilitation programme, she informs, is that these people have become more greedy. "More and more beneficiaries and villages clamour to be included in the programme. Many villages wanted relocation which did not fit in the implementation plan; others demanded re-survey of the damage after a period of

plaster on outside face of walls will enhance the life of the building and maintain its strength at the time of earthquake.

- Fired bricks that go in the construction of the building should have a compressive strength not less than 3.5 MPa. Strength of bricks and wall thickness should be selected for the total building height. The mortar should be fine-sand or clay-mud of good quality. The minimum wall thickness should be one brick in one-storey construction and one brick in top storey and one and half bricks in bottom storeys of up to three-storeys.

Most importantly, common practice of houses brushing against each other (in large cities with space constraint) should be strictly avoided. •

Pallavi Ghosh, New Delhi

Living On The Edge

Bombay is classified as a seismically risky zone

At 6.59 am, 31 May 1998, an earthquake measuring 3.6 on the Richter scale rocked Bombay and its outlying suburbs. Its epicentre was Ambe village, 35 kms away from Bombay in the Thane-Kharghar belt. It was a close call for the bustling metropolis. But then, according to the Seismic Zones map of India, 1972, Bombay has been classified as seismically risky Zone III with the likelihood of earthquakes measuring between 6 to 6.5 on Richter scale.

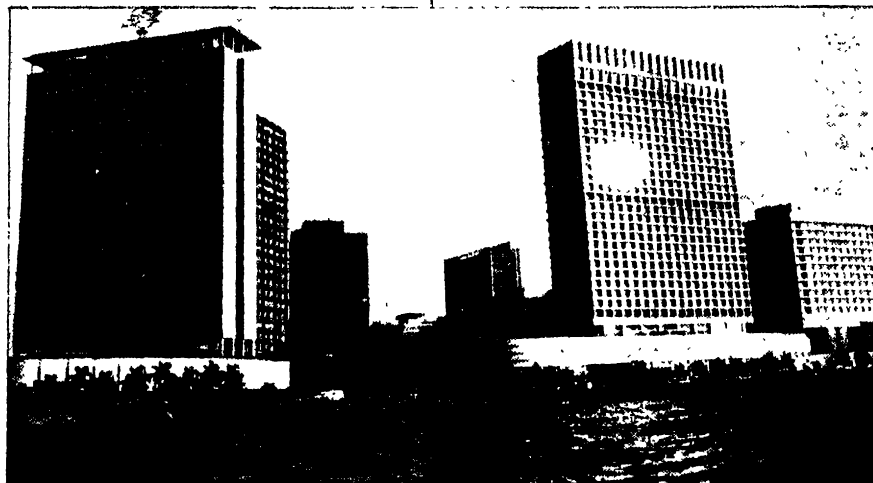
According to Prof V. Subramanyam, project adviser at Department of Earth Sciences at Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Powai, the seismic scenario of Bombay and its neighbourhood is not anything to be complacent about. Alibagh and Srivardhan along the Konkan coast, situated 110 kms away from south Bombay lie in Zone IV which has the potential for quakes in the magnitude of up to 7 on Richter scale. A few faults have also been inferred in the Bombay island: the three lakes — Powai, Vihar and Tulsi; Malad and Manori creeks; and also the coast running parallel along Malabar Hills.

Moreover, Prof Subramanyam said that three major faults run along the three creeks — Thane, Panvel and Dharamtar — which confluences near Uran village in Raigad district, located 15 kms east of Gateway of India. What's alarming is that the ONGC's oil drilling wells as well as the LPG fields are located there. Moreover, the famous Elephanta caves also lie close by.

In April 1996, minor but significant tremors were experienced at Uran. And the ONGC complex is also said to have developed a few cracks. Tremors of low to medium magnitudes have also occurred at a few places in the adjoining Thane district — Khari (1983, 1996), Bhatsanagar (1990) and Jawahar (1994) — in recent years.

However, the government is well aware of the situation. After the 31 May tremors, the state government has decided to start the Centre of Earthquake Investigations. First of its kind in the country, the centre will solely concentrate on the seismological activities. One of the possible sites for the centre is IIT, Bombay, which already has the infrastructural facilities.

The government has already sanctioned Rs 1.10 crore to IIT, Bombay, the Indian Institute of Geomagnetism and Bhabha Atomic Research Centre for a three-year integrated research project to identify possible quake-prone zones in Thane district. •



Tremors have occurred frequently in Bombay

bay, was utilised in designing seismically-resistant houses. The school building at Killari was constructed with the most sophisticated rubber technology known as 'base isolator' making it the first building of its kind in the country.

Meanwhile, the state government through its earthquake rehabilitation programme has also organised training programmes in seismically-resistant technology all over the state. It has started a campaign through schools and village local self-government to impress upon people the need for adopting seismically-resistant building technology. It has also initiated steps to introduce these features into the building by-laws of village bodies.

The government is also in the process of preparing a comprehensive multi-

hazard Disaster Management Plan (DMP) for the state which would include the risk and vulnerability analysis, emergency response plan and a mitigation strategy. It proposes to operationalise the DMP by commissioning a VHF and VSAT network throughout the state.

Joseph, whose specially designed 'earthquake and rehabilitation cell' programme comes to an end in June 1999, is satisfied with the work done. Except for a one-year extension, agreed upon by its principal donor World Bank with its US \$216 million aid, the rehabilitation programme has been successfully implemented, he claims.

"With the precautionary steps being taken and awareness generated, the state government won't be caught napping again in case of another violent tremors," he assures. •

Kanjal Walla/Bombay

more than two years which was technically not feasible."

However, one interesting feature of the earthquake rehabilitation programme, claims Johny Joseph, secretary and special commissioner (earthquake rehabilitation), is the strong conjunction of technology and community participation in the programme of seismic streng-

thening. "While preparing the plan, our main objective was to provide safe houses using earthquake-resistant technology to people. After all, it was the mud, mortar and thick roofs, not to mention, low quality of construction which was responsible for the overwhelming cause of death and destruction," said Joseph.

The technical expertise of IIT, Bom-

Revolt in the ranks



THE MANIPULATOR: "I am like an open book. There are no skeletons in my cupboard," says Kalyan Singh

UP CM Kalyan Singh faces trouble as one of his ministers quits and leads a campaign against him

There was a time, October 1997 to be specific, when Kalyan Singh was hailed as the undisputed hero of UP politics. He was the BJP's political mastermind who could outmanoeuvre rivals. He was the man who had the ability to outfox adversaries in the very game they claimed to be more adept — that of engineering defections. At the receiving end of his manipulative genius were both the Congress and the BSP heavyweight, Mayawati, Kalyan's *bete noire*. Both had been singled by his machinations in their attempt to keep him from the chief ministership. At the time, the general idea about him was the blunt, straightforward Kalyan had finally come into his own, honing his skills in realpolitik while making subtle compromises with his party's once sworn principles of clean, crime-free politics. Singh himself echoed this image shift. "After all, we are here not for *bhajan-kirtan*," he is supposed to have said. "We are into the game of politics where everything is fair."

Now, 18 months after that October coup, his over-confidence in high tide, that everything-is-fair-in-politics bit appears to have somewhat rebounded on the chief minister. Things are not exactly rosy. And there are reasons why.

- There exists a virtual Kalyan detractors' club that is trying hard to oust him because of his alleged 'double-standards' and none-too-clean dealings.
- Another criticism levelled at him is that the CM has become a shade too arrogant.
- And no one likes a man who surrounds himself with sycophants and is inaccessible to the rest.

So when did the squabbles begin?

The fight within began a couple of months ago. The arrogant and seemingly unassailable chief minister had sacked nine ministers from his huge 93-member Cabinet. Those opposed to Kalyan Singh say that the nine had dared to cross his path; so out they went.

The exit of the first few was welcomed: the chief minister was still a popular man and his ratings were high. One of those dumped was Raj Rai Singh. Wife of a bureaucrat, she had earlier switched loyalties from the Mayawati camp to the BJP and then went against Kalyan Singh in a brazen show of defiance. Defying the party whip, she abstained from the vote of confidence that was held to determine the chief ministerial claim of ally-turned-adversary Jagdambika Pal. As luck would have it, the pretender himself faltered.

Kalyan's next round of pruning accounted for Shiv Ganesh Lodhi, Dal Bahadur Kori, Gorakh Prasad Nishad and Sunder Singh Baghel. The four were accused of corruption. Ravindra Shukla, the powerful basic education minister who has a strong RSS backing, got the sack on grounds of "misinforming" the Prime Minister about his decision to introduce recitation of 'Vande Mataram' in state-run schools. The chief minister very conveniently washed his hands off the controversy making Shukla the scapegoat.

With each passing day, the chief minister was making more enemies than friends — a dangerous course to pursue in the slippery, sordid game of politics.

It was one of these enemies who finally rebelled — and openly. On the morn-



FRIENDS, ONCE UPON A TIME: the chief minister with BSP leaders Kansi Ram and Mayawati

ing of 31 March, minister of state for family welfare Devendra Singh Bhole suddenly announced his resignation. His grouse: the chief minister was refusing to bail out his brother held in a criminal case in Kanpur.

Bhole's brother was arrested for using force to get one of his cronies pulled out of police lock-up. Reprieve even-

tually came in the form of a court order to release him on bail. Immediately afterward, big brother handed in his resignation.

It was a big jolt but it didn't stop there.

What followed was a hail of accusations. The chief minister, said Bhole, was guilty of being corrupt, partisan and influenced by bureaucrats. But his real salvo was against what he thought was Kalyan Singh's "double standards". Explains Bhole: when Singh's blue-eyed MLC Ajit Singh and municipal corporator Kusum Rai were trying to 'rescue' an Ajit crony held on criminal charges from the Qaiserbagh police station, it was the circle officer, A.K. Upadhaya, who got the axe. So why was the chief minister being so bull-headed when it came to his brother?

Very valid, but the Qaiserbagh police station incident also reveals another facet of the chief minister. It's not just double standards. More glaring is how he buckled under pressure from an alleged ganglord-turned-politician and a small-time municipal corporator who enjoys close proximity to him.

For the chief minister, Bhole's accusations were bad tidings. The signs were ominous, because this was open rebellion. Shaken, he took recourse to what all cornered politicians do: use rhetoric. Talking to the media shortly after Bhole's dramatic resignation in the House, Kalyan said: "I am like an open book, anybody can see. There are no skeletons

THE BHOLE ISSUE

At the root of the trouble is Devendra Singh Bhole's enmity with his Cabinet minister Ramapati Shastri who is close to Kalyan Singh. The conflict arose over 'cuts' in the multi-crore purchases made by the family welfare department. Bhole was also sore because Shastri decided to deprive him of the authority to appoint and transfer doctors.

Bhole, a second-term MLA from Kanpur, first shot into notoriety in November 1993 when he assaulted a constable, Mohammad Shamim, inside the Jhunjhank police outpost in rural Kanpur. Shamim hit back by getting a criminal case registered against him, but Bhole never responded to court summons. Eventually, a non-bailable warrant was served against him sometime last year when he had already become a minister. Predictably, the local police failed to get the warrant executed.

Taking serious view of the matter, the Kanpur court finally set 12 April as the deadline for the minister's arrest. But even as the cops were trying to figure out how to arrest him, Bhole's brother got into trouble with the police when he attempted to 'rescue' an alleged criminal from police lock-up. He was promptly arrested, despite the best efforts of his brother.

Bhole requested Kalyan Singh to intervene but the chief minister refused. However, Bhole's brother was released on bail, but by this time the angry minister had decided to quit. And, as soon as the House convened on the morning of 31 March he announced his resignation. ♦

in my cupboard."

Even a few months back, one could have taken him for his word. To be fair to the chief minister, Kalyan Singh is known to be a man of personal integrity. Unfortunately, his responsibilities don't exactly end there. His critics point out that the chief minister is guilty of turning a blind eye to the faults of those who are close to him. They cite the example of municipal corporator Kusum Rai. The wife of a junior level officer in the state information department, Rai, apparently, has acquired such prized assets and property that she has invited an open income tax inquiry from the Central Board of Direct Taxes. Even the chief minister's son, say Singh's

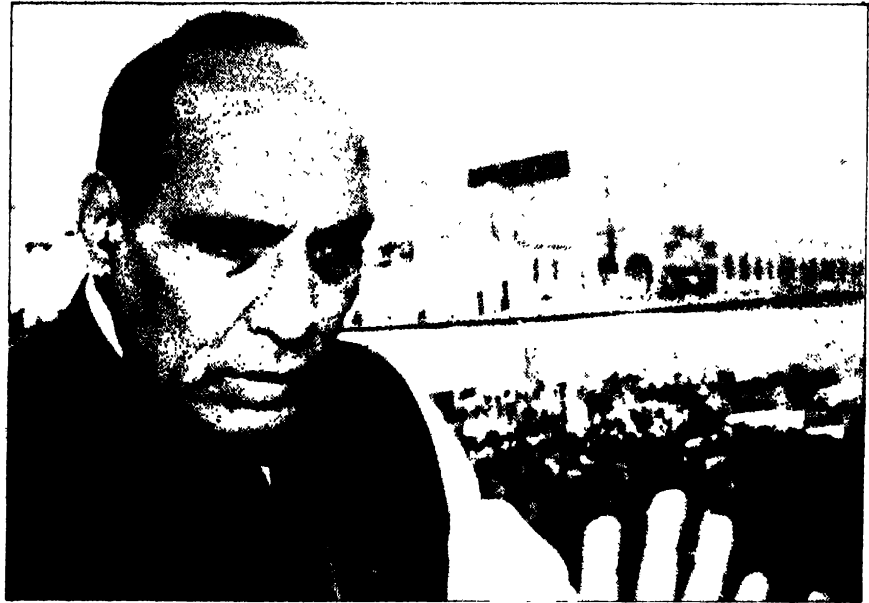
One criticism levelled at Kalyan Singh is that the CM has become too arrogant. And no one likes a man who surrounds himself with sycophants and is inaccessible to the rest

detractors, interferes in the day-to-day affairs of the administration.

One casualty of Kalyan Singh's high-handedness is Raj Nath Singh. The state BJP chief was a peeved man when Kalyan Singh named Rajendra Tiwari chairman of the State Essential Commodities Corporation after he had been sacked by Singh as the Lucknow unit chief.

It's a tricky situation for the CM. But then, one question automatically comes to mind: why had this discontent not surfaced earlier?

They couldn't, for obvious reasons. To attack an entrenched chief minister, the attackers have to be relatively invulnerable. Kalyan's key adversary Kalraj Misra, the main contender for his prized chair, was himself not in a position to mount an open offensive. Misra, say insiders, is in neck-deep trouble over large-scale irregularities in the ministries of public works and tourism which were under him. And though the other detractor, housing and urban development minister Lalji Tandon is close to Prime Minister Vajpayee, he couldn't harm the



COLD WAR: once an ally, Raj Nath Singh got put off by the chief minister's high-handedness



KEY ADVERSARY: Kalraj Misra wants an early intervention by the high command to straighten things out in UP

CM for the simple reason that the central leadership couldn't afford another Vaghela in the family.

But things are a bit different now. Emboldened by his recent re-election to the Vidhan Parishad, Misra proclaimed open rebellion by seeking "an early intervention by the party high command to straighten things out in Uttar Pradesh". He went to add: "bickerings in the party must be dealt with seriously and any further delay would tarnish its image" beyond repair. The need of the hour, he said, was for the party high command to convene a special meeting of all state leaders and legislators and seek their suggestions for finding an amicable solution.

Tandon, who unlike Misra had always made oblique references to Kalyan's "objectionable style of functioning", suggested his own formula: "the need for someone at the party level to find out why such a situation has cropped up repeatedly".

Another dissident, Rajesh Pandey, who, along with Kanpur MLA Neeraj Pandey, has been at the forefront of the disgruntled lot, said: "What we feel is that the time is ripe to find out how and why are things going wrong between the party and the government."

Rajesh, who claims to have met Vajpayee on 4 April, together with Bhole, Neeraj Chaturvedi and a few dozen others, however refused to divulge the names of the dissidents who had signed the memorandum seeking a change in the leadership.

Will there be a change? Kalyan detractors say the original 34 signatures in the memorandum to the central leadership have swelled to 50. Says a prominent anti-Kalyan figure: "This time it's a do or die battle. We will go to the Prime Minister and if no heed is paid to our demand for change, we will be constrained to resign."

Strong words. But can the chief minister ride out the storm? It's difficult to predict. Maybe he will, his bad PR notwithstanding. A fragile Centre will think twice, even thrice before replacing him in UP's volatile, faction-riven politics. •

Sharat Pradhan/Lucknow

Will The Times of India and The Hindustan Times distribute free copies next?



When we go shopping, I always eye stuff which is the cheapest. My wife does the opposite. "Cheap stuff means inferior quality," she tells me.

"Never go for such stuff."

Does this logic apply to newspapers? Everyone knows that *The Times of India* and *The Hindustan Times* are two of the leading dailies in the country. Today, their Delhi editions are priced at Re 1 on weekdays and Rs 2 on holidays. Do the proprietors really believe their publications are worth only Re 1?

Price war is nothing new in publishing. Media tycoon Rupert Murdoch slashed the prices of his *The Times* (London) some years back and the other dailies had to follow suit. Since then, British newspapers had been slashing prices off and on. What they lose by way of low prices, they try to cover up with increased ad revenue. This strategy may work for the bigger papers, not for the smaller ones.

It was in 1994, when the economy was booming, that the *Times of India* brought down its price from Rs 2.30 to Rs 1.50. The *HT* did the same after four

Two for 1



Rupert Murdoch: realised the enormity of the price war



As the price war intensifies, can we expect *Times* and *HT* to distribute free issues or even pay would-be readers for their efforts? And how nice it would be if the newspaper price war extended to other consumer products

weeks. Five years later, when the country is in the grip of a recession, the *HT* which is now 75 years old, went one step ahead and cut the price to just Re 1. This move came immediately after the *Times of India* announced that its daily circulation in Delhi had crossed the half million mark. But *HT* hit back with the news that its total readership was more than the combined figures of all other dailies in the capital. How will the *Times* react to this claim? We have to wait and watch.

Such wars are fought in areas where there is intense rivalry between two newspapers. The warfare is missing in Chennai where *The Hindu* rules supreme or Mumbai, where the *Times* is way ahead of the competition. But in Calcutta, *The Telegraph* and *The Statesman* often slug

it out, quoting circulation figures in Calcutta as well as in the rest of the state.

Is the circulation war good for the industry? I am not a management or financial expert to come out with an opinion on this. Common sense tells me that a product should be priced, based on its quality. As the price war intensifies, can we expect *Times* and *HT* to distribute free issues or even pay would-be readers for their efforts? And how nice it would be if the newspaper price war extended to other consumer products. Hindustan Lever Ltd and Colgate Palmolive had been waging a media war on the quality of their respective brands of toothpaste, but their brains trusts had not thought of reducing the prices.

Oscar fever

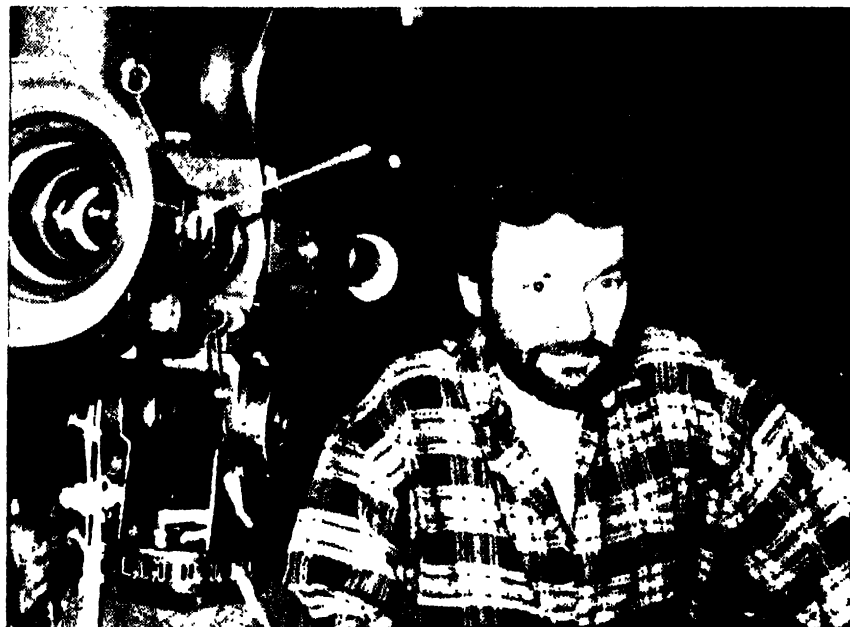
Aren't we taking the Oscar awards a bit too seriously? The media's great expectations over Shekhar Kapur's *Elizabeth* were not realised and the film got just one award. What else did we expect? That it would top the list for all the categories for which it was nominated? The reactions from some of the publications were quite juvenile. *The Pioneer* thought it fit to carry an editorial on the issue and hinted that *Elizabeth* was denied its due because of traditional Hollywood prejudices.

Can anyone argue that *Private Ryan* and *Shakespeare in Love* were inferior to *Elizabeth* and did not deserve the 12 Oscars they bagged jointly. How seriously the Indian movie industry viewed the awards can be judged by the fact that it sent the disastrous *Jeans* as its official entry! Yet, according to Shobori Ganguli in *The Pioneer*, both *Elizabeth* and *Private Ryan* lost out mainly because of racism and money power.

The Oscar awards are several decades old. Like any other awards, they too had attracted criticism on various levels. But bringing in issues like racial discrimination, I felt, was a bit too much. "However, the Academy of Motion Pictures has not been known for its courtesy to coloured skin, what with its 95 per cent white membership" was a sweeping statement. Spielberg's *Amistad* did not win any awards last year, because it was not one of his best films. *Titanic* had more mass and visual appeal. To argue that *Amistad* failed because it dealt with the theme of blacks and slavery, ranks of prejudice. Ms Ganguli, however, is right

in criticising our magnificent obsession with the Oscar awards. Today, the film industry has instituted several of its own awards, but their presentation is similar to that of the Oscar ceremony. But I did not see anything wrong in our stars viewing the Oscar as the ultimate award. It pits them against the best international

appeals hugely to the younger generation. *The Express Newslite* which is supplied along with the Mumbai edition of *The Indian Express* is strong on local news and comes out with quite a few scoops. It was the first to break the MBBS examination marks scandal where the vice-chancellor, against the



The media's great expectations over Shekhar Kapur's *Elizabeth* were not realised and the film got just one award. What else did we expect? That it would top the list for all the categories for which it was nominated?

competition and let the best persons win. If the Academy was motivated by racial prejudices, how did *Gandhi* fare so well? If we are not impressed with the Oscar awards, let us ignore them. But attributing motives where none existed is not fair.

Pulling no punches

Recession or not, the newspapers are coming out with more and more colourful pull-outs. Chandigarh's popular daily, *The Tribune* has now joined the race and its *Chandigarh Tribune* is a good mix of news, views, entertainment, all in colour. The pull-outs are of different categories. *The Bombay Times* is the most frivolous of its kind but

university regulations, ordered grace marks to be awarded to the final year MBBS students for a particularly 'difficult and unusual' question paper. The pull-out also scooped the Chancellor issuing a show-cause notice to the vice-chancellor on this issue.

A pull-out should be newsworthy, informative and entertaining. *The Chandigarh Tribune*, thankfully, is stronger on the news side. The colour pics are eye-catching. The copies I went through dealt with important issues like AIDS, attendance problems in colleges, anti-encroachment drives of the local administration, plus prices of mangoes and strawberries, garbage collection and so on. A good mix. Can we expect something more on sports? •

*Bombay Stock
Exchange president
J.C. Parekh is sacked
by SEBI. But many are
wondering: why now?*

On 23 March, the exit raised the curtains on a high drama at the 125-year-old Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE). J.C. Parekh, president of the BSE, was sacked by the capital market watchdog, Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).

Parekh was barred from officiating as an exchange director for the next three years. BSE executive director R.C. Mathur and former vice-president Rajendra Banthia were served show-cause notices.

SEBI's move came in the wake of Parekh's alleged involvement in the payment crisis that sent tremors in the BSE last year. The move was made a few days before Parekh's tenure expired on 31 March. And it took everyone by surprise. For, this was the first instance when the president was sacked in the history of the BSE.

The rise and fall of Sensex

Last year witnessed a significant development at the BSE. Between January and May, the Sensex shot up from 3,100 to 4,300 points.

This was primarily because of overbought positions on four scrips: BPL, Videocon International, Sterlite and Penatfour. Then the Sensex fell, which was equally surprising. From a high of 4,147 points on 5 May, it plunged to an unpredicted low of 3,143 points on 24 June.

The man to have engineered the high was big bull Harshad Mehta. Mehta's obsession with BPL was understandable. It was a company with low-floating stock, dividend-paying history and good results. The bull cartel went on a buying spree. Prices flared once the floating stock at the counter started drying up.

General investors were wooed through Mehta's column on the Internet. The Videocon and Sterlite scrips were bought off with proceeds from the BPL counter. Mehta went to the extent of offering his financiers shares of these scrips.

Without



J.C. Parekh (sitting): In the eye of a storm

His brokers, too, were offered shares in lieu of margins. All these stocks became a kind of "assured returns" counters for investors, dismaying the bears who were forced to take selling positions.

Bull's ball games

When the bulls and bears were fighting it out, the BSE found itself in a position where it had to pay the bulls for the non-delivery of shares by the bears. In spite of taking a ten per cent margin on the carry-forward deals, the BSE had to keep paying the bulls, who made over Rs 50 crore.

The BSE erred here by not taking the margin from the brokers even while

bulls took high selling positions. More importantly, both SEBI and BSE were aware of the price volume scenario of these shares for months but failed to take action.

The bear cartel was losing crores on every settlement. The only way out for them was to place the shares of these companies in the market and force the bulls to take delivery. But with no shares in the market, the bear cartel is believed to have resorted to stealing BPL shares from the BSE clearing house and delivering on the pay-in day.

Mehta's rivals not only short sold BPL heavily, but are also believed to have persuaded a couple of institutional investors to sell their holdings at the

a precedent



Sliding share prices

The bulls had to produce the money and take delivery of shares imposed on them all of a sudden. The market was flooded with shares, and prices fell drastically. Harshad's own brokers offloaded their positions ahead of his. All three scrips hit the lower end of the circuit filter.

Parekh explained the situation rather recently: "The brokers in distress approached the exchange for help in paying up their margins due on that day [12 June]. The transactions had to be reversed as it was a Friday and the next day was a pay-in day [for the previous trading cycle]. If we had not acted, the brokers would have to be declared defaulters. The markets would have plummeted." The explanation, on the surface, seemed reasonable. But in fact, it was not.

What nailed Parekh

There were allegations against Parekh. He is alleged to have reduced ad hoc margins on three scrips, taken group B stocks as margins and opened up the BOLT terminals after regular hours. To evade Rs 1,000-crore potential default,

raise Rs 150 crore for the entire operation. The exchange officials approached the promoters of these companies through particular brokers. The promoters chose to deal through their own preferred brokers.

One such promoter, SSKI, was reported to have picked up between 25-30 lakh shares of BPL at Rs 235 each. In the case of Videocon, Shriram Mutual Fund decided to enter into ready-forward transactions with all the trapped brokers and bailed them.

Parekh averted the crisis once the deals were reported and the sellers' accounts were credited. The Trade Guarantee Fund (TGF) that was anyway inadequate was left untouched. The potential defaulters finally paid the price for their mindless overambition. They were compelled to negotiate at much lower rates. Players dealing in these scrips had to pledge their assets. Trading rights of 18 brokers were suspended, while action is pending against another 14.

Where BSE erred

The payment crisis developed because of BSE's negligence. Had its administrators been more stringent, huge margins could not have been built in the shares of these companies.

It was also lenient while collecting margins.

SEBI investigated and found that eight brokers including former BSE vice-president Rajendra Banthia's firm

Harvest Deal Securities dealt on behalf of a group of clients close to Harshad Mehta. Executive director R.C. Mathur was summoned for a personal hearing before the SEBI regulator for his alleged failure in timely detection of price rigging.

"The BSE did a wise thing by not declaring the brokers defaulters since this would have had wider ramifications," said a former BSE vice-president. "There would be several genuine investors dealing with some of these brokers and all such investors would have been left in the lurch."

THE ALLEGATIONS

- Parekh allowed brokers to get away with huge carry-forward positions
- Reduced ad hoc margins on scrips
- BSE officials withheld information on sourcing of margins
- BSE stretched trading hours for select brokers on 12, 17 and 19 June
- Parekh accepted group B stock as margins

THE DEFENCE

- Reduction in the daily margins was not below the limits prescribed by SEBI
- Collection of margins in the form of shares was because of brokers' inability to pay in cash. Declaring them as defaulters would have created panic in the markets
- TGF was not resourced as it was inadequate
- Exchange opened after regular hours only to report deals
- The ED took whatever stocks the brokers had

Chart by Nilratan Maity

counter. When these shares were offered to the market, there was panic among the bulls. A broker gave delivery of eight lakh BPL shares in a day. Investors panicked and punters with exposure in Videocon and Sterlite sold heavily to cut losses at the BPL counter.

he opened the exchange to report the negotiated transactions that had already been accepted by the sellers and potential buyers. In such a situation, BSE had no choice but to look for outside financiers to bail out the trapped brokers.

These financiers were required to

SEBI says something, Banthia something else

In a show-cause notice to Parekh on 10 February, SEBI said, "...the president and other high-ranking officials have not conducted themselves in a professional manner and there was a complete lack of transparency in their dealing which was done to favour a certain group of brokers."

But Banthia came up with a contradictory revelation. He asserted that "at all material times between June 12th and June 24th, 1998, when the bailout was in operation, L.K. Singhvi, SEBI's ex-

many other factors in this drama, this too seems fictitious.

Can SEBI be trusted?

SEBI's toughness in removing the broker-president of a broker-driven exchange is yet another example of its inconsistency.

When the bailout was taking place, SEBI officials said that it was the exchange's internal problem. The regulator, they added, was only interested in ensuring that the settlements were completed in time. But well after the investigation had begun, they changed their attitude.



Harshad Mehta: bullying BSE

officio nominee on the governing board, was informed of each and every development on this subject. The plan of action was endorsed by the concerned SEBI officials without any reservation being expressed whatsoever if the bailout contravened SEBI regulations. It was the SEBI director's duty to point this out instead of acquiescing to the same". Banthia stated that Singhvi was kept informed even about the collection of ad hoc margins in the form of scrips, which appears to be far from the truth.

Sources reveal that the SEBI nominee was not informed about the opening of the BOLT trading system on 12 June at the 14 June board meeting. In Singhvi's recorded statement in the minutes of the board meeting held on 12 June, he expressed unhappiness on the issue, stating that the exchange had allowed large positions to be built up. No information was provided to the board on reduction in ad hoc margins in certain stocks. Singhvi was also told that stock prices were declining due to the negative impact of the Union Budget. Like so

SEBI continues to plead its ignorance about the May episode. But not many seem to buy that. Besides scrip-wise daily trade and outstanding volumes of the deals, it also has access to the carry-forward outstanding positions published daily in financial papers and also available on BSE's on-line trading system.

Moreover, SEBI claimed that the investigations were taken up because of an artificial increase in the prices of these scrips. But in BPL's case, when the investigations began, its share price was Rs 370. Once the investigations began it went down to 67 and today it's Rs 400. So the very premise of investigation has gone haywire.

In fact, some brokers claim that even today the prices of some of these scrips are being artificially pushed up by some brokers. "The new BSE board has to evolve a mechanism that keeps track of these absurd price movements," says a broker.

The brokers responsible for creating the crisis by pushing up prices are yet to be penalised. Besides, can SEBI ensure

that the bear cartel's lifting of shares from the clearing house will not set a precedent?

Conflict of interests

The BSE has a professional executive director, while the president and the vice-president are active brokers having powers in matters of margins and settlements. Compare this with the National Stock Exchange (NSE). There, the brokers constitute a minority in the executive committee that reports to the board of directors. Professionals run the exchange and brokers trade on it. As a result, powers and areas of operation do not overlap, eliminating the possibility of conflict.

Incidentally, while the NSE too was issued a show-cause notice for the same problem, the two exchanges sought to end the crisis in different ways. Whereas the NSE decided to declare the brokers defaulters, the BSE decided to restore sanity by bringing in outside financiers to bail out the trapped brokers.

According to sources, the difference is also evident from the magnitude of the problem at the two exchanges. While the BSE faced a shortfall of Rs 1,000 crore, NSE's was a mere Rs 30 crore.

Why so late?

What is intriguing is why the watchdog sacked Parekh now. There are many theories. Among them are intra-exchange rivalry, governmental pressure to bring the offenders to book, and efforts to stymie the image of the exchange before the introduction of the much-opposed derivatives trading. The final report on the crisis was ready by the end of November. But it was in mid-March that the BSE was given the go-ahead for its depository.

SEBI's act of dismissing Parekh is being viewed as an exercise in image-building. It was a move to impress investors, particularly foreign institutional ones, about its progressive and yet vigilant character. Any move to sack Parekh earlier would have jeopardised the BSE's chances of an approval for a depository. After all, it had to qualify as a 'fit and proper custodian' of public wealth.

At this point of time, every piece of a complex jigsaw puzzle seems to be falling into place. With new chapters to this tale being added each day, however, we might soon know a new and different truth. •

Devdatta Das/New Delhi

ANIMAL RIGHTS

Wailing walls

Research comes to a standstill after an institute in Calcutta is accused of being cruel to laboratory animals

SANTOSH GHOSH



BEARING THE BRUNT: a dog used in an experiment at IICB

The howl of dogs made the local residents complain against a premiere research institute. And the future of experimental research is on the verge of collapse in India. Since 1988, Dr Somnath Banerjee, assistant director and head of the dept of nuclear medicine at the Indian Institute of Chemical Biology (IICB), has been trying to develop a 'radioactive imaging kit' in collaboration with BARC. The kit is needed to assess the efficacy of treatment given to patients who have undergone kidney transplant or in those who have cardiac problems. The kit is currently being tried on humans.

But Banerjee — a recipient of the prestigious Homi Bhabha Award — has been using dogs as laboratory animals. "Since 1988, I used about 100 dogs, of which 20 had to be sacrificed," Banerjee told SUNDAY. It was these dogs which got the IICB into trouble.

A number of people living in the institute's vicinity complained to the director that "the dying cry of dogs caused unbearable mental pain and shocks" to them. A copy of the

complaint was given to the Calcutta Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (CSPCA).

The Society was quick to get into the act. CSPCA president Jehangir immediately went to IICB and found that the institute was indeed conducting experiments using rats, rabbits and guinea pigs. They also found 'two dogs on which experiments were on...were unnecessarily tied with heavy rusted chain with three to four folds.' According to Jehangir, they were told by Banerjee and his associates that 'an animal activist organisation called Compassionate Crusaders Trust (CCT) was supplying the dogs.'

But CCT's Debashis Chakraborty denied the charge. He pointed out that the only time they met Banerjee was when "he wanted to give us a monkey after completing his experiment and we took it." Banerjee later admitted that he was under the "wrong impression" that the dogs were supplied by the CCT. This was because when he went to the dog pound at Dhapa to collect two animals for experimentation as per the directive of the chief health officer, Calcutta Municipal Corporation, he met people from the CCT there. So he assumed that the ani-

imals were supplied by this organisation

According to IICB sources, it is the game of one-upmanship amongst animal welfare organisations which has blown the entire matter out of proportion. In fact, Jehangir even reportedly suggested blacklisting of the CCT while Chakraborty maintained his stand: "We don't feel threatened and will continue working for the animal cause." He followed it up by launching a mobile animal assistance van with the help of the ministry of social justice. Present at the occasion were celebrities like General (retd) Shankar Roychoudhury and Russi Mody.

But things did not end here. After the CSPCA forwarded its report to the welfare ministry, A P. Singh, deputy secretary, shot out a fax to IICB, saying that the "institute was carrying out experiments on animals...in violation of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960." He also referred to the Breeding and Experiments on Animals (control and supervision) Rules, 1998, and ordered that "the institute must immediately



SOFT CORNER: Maneka Gandhi

release all animals in its custody and cease experimentation on animals."

After the order was passed, the CSPCA inspected IICB premises on 17 March and went away after confiscating two dogs because they did not have the infrastructure to take all the animals, the number of which exceeds 5,000. CSPCA's report allegedly referred to gross irregularities committed by the institute with regard to adherence to the existing laws on animal and their use in experiments.

Meanwhile, with the embargo in place, the institute is having to put up with wastage which runs into lakhs of rupees every day. This includes wastage of valuable radioactive chemicals with short half-life and also wastage of manpower. Some IICB scientists point out that the social welfare ministry had no authority to pass such an order because the institute was not in its control.

Scientists from different institutes are now thinking of taking up the issue jointly because if the stricture continues, biological research in the country will come to a halt. Proposals given by the Committee for the Purpose of Control and Supervision of Experiments on Animals (CPCSEA), headed by Maneka Gandhi, are now being scrutinised by another expert committee. Until specific guidelines come into force, the fate of animals used in laboratories will hang in the balance.

And so will the fate of research. •

Jayanta Basu/Calcutta

UTTAR PRADESH

In the name of the lord

While the PM agrees to abide by what the courts will decide, Kalyan Singh promises to build the Ram temple.

When chief minister Kalyan Singh set out for his much-publicised visit to Ayodhya recently, people thought he was going there to keep the sadhus in good humour. Earlier, the sadhus had made known their displeasure for the CM by staging a *dharna* outside the Assembly in Lucknow. "Kalyan Singh has no time for sadhus who made it possible for him to reach where he is now," they felt.

But no one thought the CM would go overboard. But Kalyan did precisely that, and at the cost of contradicting none other than Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee. In sharp contrast to the PM's stand of keeping the Ayodhya issue off the coalition government's national agenda, the CM reiterated his "commitment" to build the Ram temple.

Referring to the makeshift temple standing on the debris of the razed Babri Mosque, an aggressive Kalyan Singh --- fac-

Land in question

Conflicting interests threaten the Kangerghati National Park in Madhya Pradesh

A running battle is on between forest officials and villagers at the Kangerghati National Park in Bastar, Madhya Pradesh. The 200 sq.km park, situated about 36 km from Jagadapur, the Bastar district headquarters, is one of the few remaining stretches of virgin wilderness in the state where trouble has been brewing for some time now.

Tribals living inside the forest area and on the park's fringes are doggedly resisting efforts by the forest department to evict them. Even those living well outside the forest area are demanding unhindered entry into the place to collect firewood and forest products.

And caught in a cleft-stick are forest guards who have strict instructions to keep intruders at bay. In trying to enforce the rules, they have incurred the wrath of the villagers, while little or no protection is provided to them by their higher-ups. A few solitary guards are finding it impossible to push back batches of villagers who make their way into the forest from secluded points. Besides, they badly outnumber the men in uniform and often literally force



CM-VERSUS-PM: Kalyan Singh with Vajpayee

ing trial for his role in the 1992 demolition — did not mince words. "The sanctum sanctorum of the temple will be at the spot where the deity of Ram is installed at present," he said, adding, "and that will be done at all costs."

Such an outburst, coming on the eve of Vajpayee's visit to Lucknow, caused deep concern in the BJP. Many in the top leadership saw this as Kalyan's attempt to embarrass the PM, who had made it clear on more than one occasion that he would abide by the court order in this matter.

While in Lucknow, the Prime Minister echoed the same sentiment. Initially he pleaded ignorance of what Kalyan had said in Ayodhya the previous day. "How can I comment on what I

their way in.

"We are being battered from both sides," said a hapless guard at Kutumsair, a village of Dhurwa tribals which has been there inside the forest for generations. "The officers have even threatened to deduct our salaries, if forest products are stolen by the villagers," the guard lamented.

LIVE AND LET LIVE: Dhurwa tribals inside Kangerghati National Park



have not read or heard myself," he told newsmen. "Perhaps Kalyan Singhji would like to answer your queries himself," he added.

Kalyan's detractors in the BJP, who had organised a civic reception for Vajpayee, expressed their displeasure at what they thought was the chief minister's bid to scuttle the day's events. After all, the organisers had managed to bring in prominent Islamic scholars, including Maulana Ali Mian and Maulana Kalbe Sadiq, the president and the vice-president of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board respectively as well as leading Christian priests as "guests of honour" for the grand ceremony.

Maulana Ali Mian was not keeping well and was not expected to attend the civic reception. But the Prime Minister had already made up his mind to call on the ailing Islamic scholar at his residence in the Nadwa-tul-Ulema, the internationally-acclaimed university for Islamic studies of which the Maulana is also the rector.

This was to be Vajpayee's first visit to Maulana's house and Kalyan's outburst prompted octogenarian Ali Mian ask Vajpayee how he proposed to keep India's integrity, unity and secularism intact. "Hindus and Muslims are sailing in the same boat and if the boat sinks, both will perish, regardless of who sank the boat," he reportedly told Vajpayee. All through the meeting, Kalyan remained a silent spectator.

The reasons behind Kalyan's outburst remain unclear: was it done merely to embarrass the PM? Or did he want to bring Ayodhya back in focus? •

Sharat Pradhan/Ayodhya

Situated at a height of about 2,000 feet, the park gets its name from the Kanger river which runs through it. The forest is spread over undulating land that hosts a variety of trees such as *sal*, *segun*, *arjun*, *mahua*, bamboo and animals like tigers, panthers, *sambars*, bears, *chitals*, wild buffaloes, *neelgai*, wild boars etc besides several species of birds and reptiles. The forest has also sustained for centuries people who have lived near it.

In the village of Batarimohu, all the 108 Bisonhorn Maria families have been dragged into a court case for encroaching on areas falling under the national park and reserved forests. This village was an old settlement once from which people had fled because of prowling tigers. Their descendants, however, began returning to their roots in 1980, where the land had become doubly fertile after being left fallow for decades. But, in the process, they landed themselves on the wrong side of the law as the plots they cleared for farming and settled on were within reserved forests, parts of which were later converted into the Kangerghati National Park.

In terms of its natural splendours, the park has every potential of becoming a tourists' paradise with the Kanger river, several caves and waterfalls providing a most varied setting. But if the conflict between preservationist interests and those of the forest people are not reconciled quick enough, the forest itself may come to harm. •

Neelam Gupta with M.A. Iqbal/Kangerghati

Moving experience

The dying and the dead were brought to life on Sony

Rejoice, all ye of little faith who'd given up hope for the deep-in-coma Amrita in *Alpviram*. In the last episode, an eyelid flickers. An indistinct word emerges. The nurse is all smiles. Her *dada* and *dadi* are jubilant. So are we, who suffered the indignities of this Sony serial (Tuesday, 9 pm) for the past few months.

This has been one of those pieces of fiction which are compulsive precisely because they've been based on such a dislikeable premise. *Alpviram* began with a much-in-love couple, played by Pallavi Joshi and Amir Bashir, getting engaged. The respective parents are at hand, rings are being exchanged, when the leading lady crumples into a dead faint.

It is not a case of maidenly vapours, the doctors tell her shocked fiance, and her old grandparents. It is an old-fashioned coma and there is no telling if, rather than when, she will come out of it. Long-drawn hamming on the part



LIVING ON THE EDGE: Pallavi Joshi

of the old folks, played by Sulbha Deshpande and Anjan Srivastav, passes for acting in the following episodes. The fiance remains steadfast at the patient's bedside even when he discovers that she has been raped-while-in-coma, and is pregnant.

As if this wasn't bad enough, we are confronted by a hospital orderly who talks tough, and takes up an inordinate amount of space, other staff who talk coarse, and administrators who engage in pointless intrigue to cover up the ghastly deed. Now that Amrita is in wakeful mode, maybe we can get to the heart of the story.

Also on Sony last week, another lifeless body was being brought to life. In *Aahat*, a mad scientist injects a fresh corpse with high-voltage current. The lights in the laboratory, straight out of a bad sci-fi movie, flash; the electricity crackles, and, the chap in the chair opens his eyes.

But not before he's turned a deep shade of blue. •

NORTH-EAST

Point of return

The central government announces rehabilitation package for militants

The much-awaited central government rehabilitation package for militants in the north-east has been announced. According to the package, the state governments of the north-east will implement the scheme with 100 per cent reimbursement from Government of India.

The scheme has twin objectives: to wean away misguided youths and hardcore militants who have strayed and now find themselves trapped; and to ensure that militants who have surrendered do not find it attractive to fall back on violent ways again.

Militants who have surrendered with at least one weapon will be eligible for benefits given under the various schemes. But in exceptional cases, militants who surrender without weapons will also be eligible for these benefits. Surrenders must take place before the army, central paramilitary forces, district magistrates, superintendents of police and other notified officers.

As per the scheme, surrendered militants will be initially lodged in a rehabilitation camp with facility for training in a particular trade or vocation of their choice and as per their aptitudes. They will be paid a stipend not exceeding Rs 2,000 a month for 12 months and lodging at the camp will be free.

The package also includes incentives for surrender of weapons. A person surrendering with rocket launchers, UMG, GPMC, RPG, sniper rifles and PIMCA will get Rs 25,000 per weapon. Cash incentives for other weapons include Rs 15,000 per weapon for AK-series rifles, Rs 3,000 for 303 rifles, pistols, revolvers and other service weapons, Rs 1,000 per rocket, Rs 500 per grenade, Rs 3,000 for each remote control device, Rs 300 per round of ammunition, Rs 1,000 for a short-range wireless set, Rs 5,000 for a long-range wireless set, Rs 3,000 for IED and Rs 1,000 per kilogram of explosives.

Meanwhile, chief minister Prafulla Mahanta has informed the Assembly that as many as 16 insurgent groups are still active in Assam, of which 12 are demanding secession from the country. According to the CM, for the last 15 years, Assam has been ravaged by terrorism. During the last ten years, the militants have killed as many as 1,952 persons while 865 were kidnapped. Altogether 129 security personnel including 101 policemen were killed.

Commenting on the rehabilitation package, tribal Bodo MP S.K. Bwismutiary from Kokrajhar said, "The package does not look practical and I think the government is trying to adopt a divide-and-rule policy by splitting militant factions. In the long-run such a policy will boomerang." He also stressed the need for holding political dialogue with the militants.

Incidentally, at least 30 rebel groups are now operating in the north-east and their demands range from secession to greater autonomy. An estimated 50,000 lives have been lost to insurgency in the seven north-eastern states in the past five decades. •

Dileep Chandon/Guwahati

**ARIES**

(21 March-20 April)

Take note of all that goes on around you. It could be that you are in love and want to show just how you feel. Colleagues are sympathetic to your desires and show understanding. Play it by ear. You will find that things will fit into place if you don't force the issue.

TAURUS

(21 April-20 May)

You have a really sensitive touch which should not be wasted if you can create something artistic or make someone feel good. You will be glad to improve the appearance of your work-place. This should be well-starred. Even the small improvements can give your morale a boost.

GEMINI

(21 May-20 June)

You need peace and comfort. See to it that you get it, because home is what you make it yourself. Friends may be taking on too much and may turn to you for help. Make your position quite clear and look after your own family before getting involved with social excesses.

CANCER

(21 June-20 July)

Don't bite off more than you can chew. You appear to have an artistic flair that you should put to good use. Show someone that you really love them in a practical way. Much more can be achieved by demonstration.

LEO

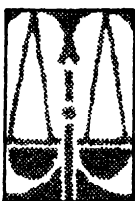
(21 July-20 August)

You may have a serious upset or just feel generally out of sorts. Be careful about what you do and how you do it. Relatives can be unreliable. A promise will not be kept and you can be left literally holding the bag. Don't just give in. Stick to your guns.

**LIBRA**

(21 September-20 October)

Don't push your luck too far. Friends can easily take offence. Be extra careful about the way you handle your money. More can go out than will come in if you exceed your budget limit. Not everything you desire depends on material values. Keep up a cheerful front.

**SAGITTARIUS**

(21 November-20 December)

Let things take their natural course, otherwise you will be a nervous wreck. If others want to share their problems with you, don't become too deeply involved. You have your own problems to worry about. Keep a low profile. Things will improve soon. Travel plans can be disrupted.

CAPRICORN

(21 December-20 January)

All sorts of things can bother you, so you probably need to be selective. Attend to the main issues first. A health problem could cause you concern, or you could be looking after someone who is ill. Someone may be willing to give you support or promote you in a big way.

AQUARIUS

(21 January-20 February)

Tread softly to be effective. Making an exhibition of yourself will not achieve anything. There is much good to be done quietly behind the scenes. Keep ahead of the opposition by using your imagination and trying to be original. A romantic rendezvous can make you happy.

PISCES

(21 February-20 March)

Complete your preparations for a new venture. Establish links that will stand the test of time. Discussions can be most useful and can make you feel more at ease about the future. Charitable institutions should be promoted to the full.

VIRGO

(21 August-20 September)

Be honest with those you love, because there can be distasteful rumours which cause misunderstandings. Try to stick to one thing at a time. Your natural desire to please will not work as you had hoped, so cut your losses and think about another start.

SCORPIO

(21 October-20 November)

Try to get away from those who are too deeply involved in keeping up a social front. You will probably wish to have time for yourself in order to get organized. Intimate relationships can be a bit uptight at the moment.

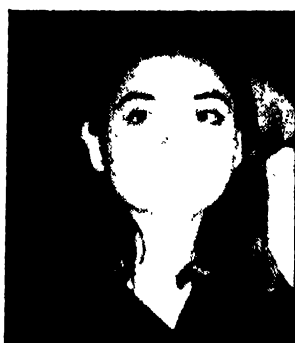
Saving their feathers

■ Why has the export of peacock feathers been put on the negative list?

Earlier, India could freely export peacock feathers for which there isn't exactly a booming demand but as an exotic product it featured in many stores in the US and Europe.

However, export meant that peacocks would be caught and killed. Killing peacocks is banned. But hunting them for feathers for export is okay? An obvious anomaly, which was pointed out by social justice minister Maneka Gandhi, who met Hegde a week before the exim policy was to be announced.

The matter was discussed between the two who are friends of old, and it was deci-



Maneka Gandhi: positive step

ded that putting peacock feathers on the negative list (i.e., items which cannot be traded in) would be a powerful disincentive to the poaching of peacocks. So that's where it is now.

Policy differences

■ Why is commerce minister Ramakrishna Hegde fighting so much with the finance ministry, especially with the officials?

HEARD AT SANCHAR BHAVAN

He tried it at Turkman Gate and it worked. So he's using the same formula in the telecom sector.

A BUREAUCRAT ON TELECOM MINISTER JAGMOHAN'S PROPENSITY TO USE DEMOLITION AS A TOOL OF MANAGEMENT



Ramakrishna Hegde: taking pot-shots

Days before the exim policy was announced, the finance and commerce ministers | had a meeting and went through the policy line by line. The revenue secretary

CHECK-LIST

Free trade zones: why they won't work

■ **Who will be in charge?** According to the commerce minister, all existing export processing zones will be turned into free trade zones. But the finance ministry says it doesn't know who will be in charge in these zones. Will it be the development commissioner? Or the customs?

■ **Can you have two sets of laws?** The commerce minister says he is open to the labour ministry's suggestions to have a separate set of investor friendly labour laws for the FTZs — a precursor to the system in Jebel Ali FTZ or in China. But can the country have two sets of laws?

■ **What do we get out of it?** The finance ministry is opposed to the idea that the FTZ should be obligation-free. According to the exim policy, FTZ units will neither have to export everything they produce, nor be required to add value to what they sell. So, what do we get out of it, asks the finance ministry.

■ **Will it help growth in exports?** The industry ministry wants more details on how the FTZs will help the growth of export-oriented industries. After all, the commerce ministry promised 20 per cent growth in exports — which, at the end of the year, wasn't even three per cent.

was also present, and he explained for instance, that extending the export promotion capital goods scheme by allowing zero-duty imports for the plastics and textiles sectors alone would mean a huge loss in revenue, nearly Rs 1,000 crore.

But was the commerce minister listening?

Apparently not, because many of the things the finance ministry had objected to find a place in the new exim policy. No wonder industry is pleased as punch and Hegde is taking pot-shots at the finance ministry officials.

Success story?

■ At a press conference to announce the Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited's annual performance, the public sector behemoth's large PR team was present.

The problem was that



G.V. Ramakrishna: take a look at BHEL

there was nothing terribly triumphant about BHEL's performance.

So a member of the PR team nudged a journalist and suggested a question. The journalist obliged by asking it.

The question was: "What is the inside story of BHEL's success?"

The mood of the press conference changed dramatically. Of such stuff are public sector successes made. Is G.V. Ramakrishna listening? •

The kingmaker

■ What a turnout there was for Kamal Nath!

Whether spontaneous or not, his recent visit to Indore was truly spectacular. The whole city was festooned with banners which said Kamal Nath was the only leader of any consequence in Madhya Pradesh. Posters also proclaimed Kamal Nath as 'Kingmaker'—a title most politicians would be wary of acknowledging. The implication clearly was that while Digvijay Singh might be chief minister, the man to whom credit should go for his appointment was Kamal Nath. Huge crowds waited



Kamal Nath: CM-in-waiting? to receive Nath and they easily surpassed the kind of crowds other senior leaders used to draw on their visits to the city.

Obviously all this has a purpose. Nath is out touring the state three weeks in a month. If Sonia Gandhi comes to power and appoints Digvijay Singh at the Centre, Nath clearly believes he will be chief minister. The question is what does Digvijay think about all this?

Behind the scenes

■ What really happened to make Jayalalitha so angry that she moved from

HEARD IN THE CPI(M) CENTRAL OFFICE

The government thought it was on a Goan Holiday. But Jayalalitha decided it should Go On Holiday. So we're trying to help her.

AN OFFICE-BEARER OF THE CPI(M) ON THE CRISIS IN THE BJP-LED GOVERNMENT

the Ashok to the Taj when she was in Delhi?

The Prime Minister's foster daughter Namita and his granddaughter Neha went to the airport to receive Jayalalitha. The AIADMK leader is very fond of Neha (the last time she was in Delhi she asked Neha what her favourite colour was, and this time she presented her a frock in the same colour). Along with Jayalalitha was

her friend, Sasikala. So when the three ladies and one child reached the Ashok with their respective SPG men, all of them crowded into one lift.

So far the atmosphere was cordial. But the liftman just couldn't get the lift moving. Everytime he would press the button, the sign would go ping, with the legend 'Overweight' coming on in bright red. The two teams of SPG



Jayalalitha: embarrassing problems

men kept eyeing each other. But neither would leave their post. Finally, it was the liftman who fled.

So Jayalalitha decided to get out and got into the next lift with her securitymen (half of whom got left behind). When she reached her room, there was no water. That was the last straw. So she moved out.

CHECK-LIST

Histrionics in Legislative Assemblies

■ **Andhra Pradesh:** An MLA tried to commit suicide on the floor of the House by attempting to drink pesticide, as a way to protest against the state government's apathy to the plight of cotton-growers who are killing themselves because of indebtedness. The Speaker ruled that the House was a place for discussion, not for committing suicide.

■ **Uttar Pradesh:** Last year, MLAs had a fistfight in the Assembly leading to broken heads and bruises. The issue was a dispute over majority. After this the Speaker ordered that microphones and chairs in the House be screwed down to prevent their misuse by MLAs—who used them as missiles during the fistfight.

■ **Tamil Nadu:** Tamil Nadu Assembly MLAs are the most active of all. Last week, one MLA assaulted another who had to be hospitalised. This is probably the fifth instance of assault in the Assembly's history.

■ **Karnataka:** "I don't believe in God, but if he exists, he will not forgive you for condoning my humiliation," said Speaker Ramesh Kumar when revenue minister B. Somashekar defied a privilege notice against him and ministers in the Janata Dal government stood by the minister, opposing the Speaker. In Karnataka, clashes in the Assembly are largely cerebral.

An officer's agony

■ When former enforcement chief M. Bezbaruah was moved out and replaced by Inderjeet Khanna, there were many who believed that the government had done the right thing.

But there are many who believe that what is happening now is immoral and wrong. For Bezbaruah, who is a senior officer, has been moved out of the ED, cutting short his tenure, but hasn't got any orders to be posted anywhere. The government is pretending he doesn't exist.

But isn't the government being petty and vindictive? Is this the right way to treat upstanding and honest officers, even if they are inconvenient?

But the PMO has its own scores to settle. And that is the problem. •

Out of order

■ The standoff between telecom operators and the ministry is worrying the Prime Minister a great deal. In fact, so much that he is thinking of another shake up in his ministry, shifting mini-



A.B. Vajpayee: worried about the telecom department

ster Jagmohan to some other office.

It would have helped if the bureaucrats had been cooperative. But telecom secretary Anil Kumar is as inflexible as the minister, therefore there is a move to shift him to Rajasthan as chief secretary. The PMO hopes that this move will have a salutary effect and the minister will not be required to be shifted.

But then who knows. By then whole government may have shifted — to the Opposition.

In a new role

■ It is nice to see at least one minister taking his work so seriously. Information minister Pra-

HEARD IN NEW DELHI

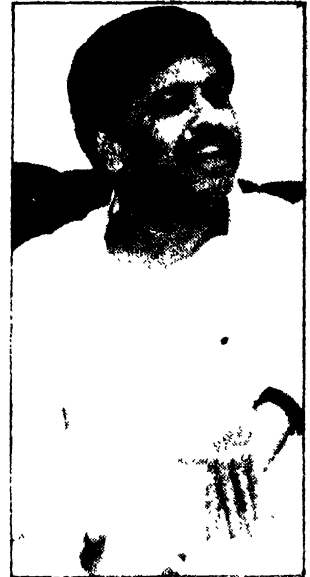
I was giving outside support.

AN ARRESTED JANATA DAL WORKER, WHEN ASKED WHAT HE WAS DOING LOITERING OUTSIDE 10 JANPATH

younger brother company (he'd come to watch the match with a *jatha* of 1,000 Pakistanis). Most people thought it was a token gesture. But Pramod Mahajan is totally professional at anything he does. So he sat through the entire 8-hour match.

Which was fine. But in between, he thought he should teach himself something about his ministry. So he walked into the commentator-box and took over the commentary. For nearly an hour, the commentators were Harsha Bhogle and information minister Pramod Mahajan.

Then he was asked if he'd ever played cricket. No, I can't say I have, said Mahajan looking suitably modest. But you know people in Bombay are very fond of playing cricket. So when I'm in Bombay and I see a cricket match going on in the neighbourhood, I always get down



Pramod Mahajan: loves cricket

from my car to watch it.

Younger minister should learn something from this devotion to duty.

Darshan list

■ There were many who came to pray to the Sai Baba of Puttaparthi while he was in Delhi — and not all of them with holy intentions.

The Sai Baba stayed with Kulwant Rai, an industrialist, at his Aurangzeb Road residence. Among the visitors he had there were Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Sharad Pawar, former Lok Sabha Speaker Shivraj Patil and former Chief of Naval Staff Vishnu Bhagwat.

At least, two of these visitors are troubled men — Pawar and Bhagwat. And presumably they had called on the Sai Baba to seek peace.

However, Bhagwat spent a great deal more time talking to the political leaders than seeking Sai Baba's counsel. The three leaders were huddled together for several minutes and discussed business before taking Sai Baba's blessings. •

CHECK-LIST

Continued from last week. Here are some more unlikely seminarists

■ **Dev Anand:** Growing old gracefully

■ **Pramod Mahajan:** How to avoid publicity and keep a low profile

■ **Ajit Singh:** Sticking by your political party

■ **Subramanian Swamy:** Decency and politeness

■ **I.K. Gujral:** Fighting the Pakistani menace

■ **Jaewant Singh:** Clear and precise diction

■ **Kamal Nath:** The genius of Digvijay Singh

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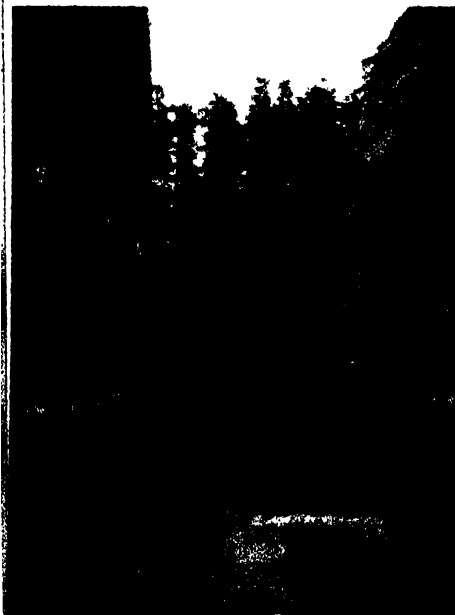
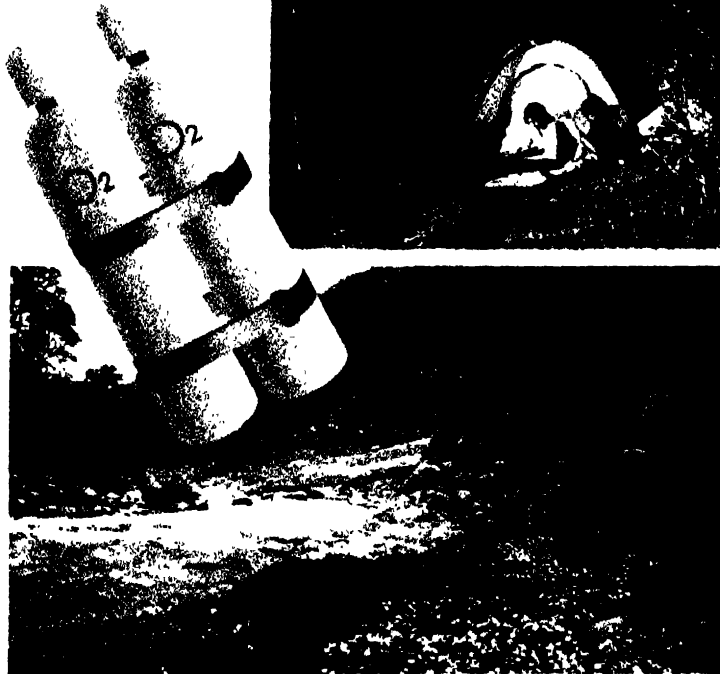
SUNDAY



J a y a !

The mistress of contradictions

If you're dying for a breath
of rare oxygen, Pithoragarh,
Chaukori, Sitalakhet, Mukteshwar,
Binsar, Champawat or Kausani
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will make you come
alive again!



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Letters.....	4
Sight and Sound.....	6
Seen.....	7
Profile.....	26
Spotlight.....	40
Khaas Baat.....	42
News.....	59
Sunday Week.....	63
Business Diary.....	64
Random Notes.....	65
Delhi Diary.....	66



ENTERTAINMENT

Friends of music

They were just four to start with. Now Delhi's song-loving fraternity is swaying to their beat.....38

COLUMNS

GUEST COLUMN

Jaya Jaitly.....8

MANI-TALK

Mani Shankar Aiyar.....11

THE SOUTH BLOCK

Inder Malhotra.....31

POWER PLAY

Rajiv Shukla.....58

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COVER STORY 16

Jaya!

The mistress of contradictions

INTERVIEW 32

"Hey kya bolti tu..."

Aamir Khan on how he became an actor, what he likes in people, being a *tapori* and why Khandala is the most important place on earth for him



THE BUSINESS PROFILE 28

Moving ahead with Murthy

The man behind Infosys, one of the fastest-growing IT companies in India





Killing them softly

The cover story *Waiting to die* (4—10 April) is one of the most graphic accounts of the effects of uranium mining in Bihar that I have ever read. That the UCIL plant in Jaduguda, Bihar is causing so much of radiation, genetic mutation and slow death among the hapless villagers who have nowhere to go is almost unbelievable. The pictures told their own story of ailments, deformities and debilitation and the villagers seem to have stoically accepted their fate. Each picture, so vivid and poignant, was

more eloquent than words.

In fact, it is only in India that companies like the UCIL are being allowed to get away scot-free after being responsible for deforming and debilitating thousands of people. And the UCIL simply disclaims its responsibilities by denying that the radiation exposure to the villagers is within the prescribed limits. But what reality is the prescribed limit? And have they ever sent a team of officials to Jaduguda to see what the effects of radiation are? While the authorities turn a blind eye, the villagers have no option but to keep on suffering.

Saheli Guha, Calcutta (West Bengal)

■The cover story on the effects of uranium mining in Jaduguda touched a chord in the hearts of many people. Hopefully the government now wakes up to reality and takes a few steps before it is too late. It is time the UCIL authorities ensure that the existing tailing pond and the ones that are to be constructed in the future do not pose any radiation hazard to the villagers.

A detailed health survey must be done immediately and the affected people should be compensated. The damage done already to the villagers cannot be undone but at least can be stopped right now. If along with the Jharkhand Organisation Against Radiation (JOAR), some charitable organisation came to the peoples' help, it would be a great relief for them.

The UCIL might have given jobs but has brought debility and death as well. And it is time villagers along with the JOAR forced UCIL to shut shop in Jaduguda.

Anita Gupta, New Delhi

Temple politics

This refers to the story *The VHP's gameplan* (14—20 February). The opposition to the Madhya Pradesh government's move to take over the management of Hindu shrines is very much justified.

While churches and mosques are managed by their respective religious followers, how is it then a secular government would try

and take over Hindu temples and manage them? Congress-ruled MP government's attempt negates the very secular concept by which the party stands. If the Hindu temples come under government control, temple boards will be full of ruling partymen and income generated from the temple will not be spent towards the propagation and preservation of Hindu Dharma, but will go to the party coffers.

If the government has its way, then temple customs and religious beliefs of the Hindu community will be tampered by the government's directives. The Hindu temples will become just another appendage of whichever party rules the state and will be forced to dance to the tunes of politicians in power.

The Madhya Pradesh government should give up this ill-conceived and anti-Hindu move. And the people should resist the state's interference in their religious freedom.

N. Prasad, New Delhi

Pill passion

While medicines are prescribed for curing diseases, the concept has changed today altogether (*Pill power*, 21—27 March). Today pharmaceutical companies are guided solely by business motive and doctors work as agents for promoting drugs of specific companies.

Patients' psychology has also changed. Today's patients opt for drugs that give quick remedies and improve their lifestyle. Thus pills are no more sold as drugs but rather as commodities which are advertised in media just like other product. Who knows, some day we will even have exchange offer from these pharmaceutical companies for depositing

An emaciated man at Jaduguda: death at the door



expired drugs and getting back new ones in return!
Bedsashruti Mitra, Raigarh (Madhya Pradesh)

Nightingale of India

This refers to story, *Lata!* (14—20 March). The exclusive interview of Lata Mangeshkar impressed me very much. Lata is not only the favourite singer of all Indians but of all music-loving people in the world. The interview would have been more interesting had Lata commented on the modern Bengali songs sung by Suman Chattopadhyay and Nachiketa.

4 **Samir Chakraborty, Howrah (West Bengal)**

■ The interview of Lata Mangeshkar couldn't have come at a better time, especially when jealousies, self-promoting gimmicks and self-proclaimed importance were flying thick and fast among musicians and some artists. It is unfortunate that Jasraj made an attempt to lampoon her.

The nightingale of India, who received Padma Vibhushan, truly deserves the highest honour of India—Bharat Ratna—for her musical talent which has enthralled people not only in India but people throughout the world.

Vikram Poddar, Bangalore (Karnataka)

Coming of age

I read the article *The shadow cabinet* (13—20 March) with interest. Since Sonia Gandhi got into the rough and tumble of Indian politics, she has come a long way and has matured herself a lot. She knows how to gauge the psyche of the regional politicians and knows whom to have alliance with in future elections.



Bhaichung Bhutia:
(extreme left): close call

Sonia knows very well that people are fed up with the coalition government and her party would form the central government only after having an absolute majority in the Lok Sabha. And in that case, Manmohan Singh should be chosen as the Prime Minister since he is the only leader to have a clean public image.

V. Gangadaran, Coimbatore (Tamil Nadu)

Don't lose heart

This refers to the story *Breaking barriers* (21—27 March). Bhaichung Bhutia will always be

remembered as the first Indian footballer to come to England to be considered for a trial in a football club.

Although Bhutia couldn't make it to Aston Villa, one of England's top football clubs, he should not lose heart. Being eligible for trial in a premier club in England is no mean feat. And Bhutia certainly deserves praise for the chance he got for a trial. The young footballer has talent and he will succeed in his next attempt.

Shiv Gurung, Gangtok (Sikkim)

A grievous error

I am writing in regard to the article *Portrait of the advi-*

sor as the human bomb (21—27 March). It was Guruswamy who used to hold his own little durbar in the finance ministry. It's a common knowledge that reporters used to come to his room to get inside information. His demeanour was calculated to give visitors an impression that he was second to none, not even the finance minister. Bureaucrats found it irksome to be interrupted in meetings. Even notes put up for the finance minister were leaked to the press without Sinha's knowledge.

True, Yashwant Sinha made a grievous mistake in selecting Guruswamy as his adviser.

Blmal Chaudhury, Calcutta (West Bengal)

Muddled thinking

This refers to the story *Sonia's song* (4—10 April). It has been rightly pointed out that Sonia is yet to decide on the future strategy of the party.

The first sign of the Congress's confusion came on the Bihar issue. First, the party has decided to remove the Rabri Devi government but when the Centre imposed President's Rule and decided to continue with it, the Congress shied away from supporting the BJP stand.

The Congress is also undecided on whether to try and destabilise the government at the Centre, or let it run till it falls on its own. In fact, the advantage the Congress had garnered at the last Assembly elections had been lost. There is still uncertainty about which way the party will go finally but what is more than clear is that the line taken at the party's Panchmarhi is being given a quiet burial.

Nitin Kumar, Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh)

SEPARATED AT BIRTH?

PRIZES FOR CONTRIBUTIONS



Ila Arun
 Singer



Deepa Mehta
 Film-maker

Contributed by Shyamal Kumar Manna, Calcutta (West Bengal)

MILESTONES

AWARDED: to Dr Usha Nayar, head of the department of Women's Studies at the NCERT, the 1998 Star Woman of the Year Award by Pakistan's Star Girls and Women's Foundation.

DIED: P.V. Kunhikkannan, 78, veteran CPI(M) leader and for long convenor of the Kerala LDF committee, at Kozhikode on 9 April. He is survived by his wife, son and three daughters.

DIED: Narayan Birabara Samanta, Oriya freedom fighter and former deputy Speaker of the state Assembly, at Jatni, near Bhubaneswar, on 9 April.

EXTENDED: by three months, by the Supreme

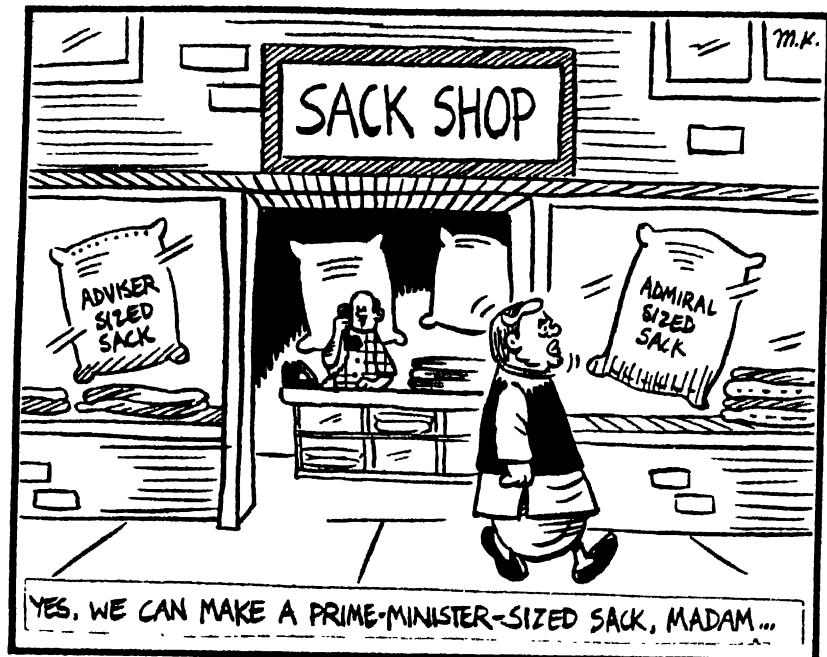


Court, the interim bail granted to RJD chief Laloo Yadav and 16 others accused in the fodder scam case.

LAUNCHED: at the Goa shipyard, the navy's second fast-attack craft built under a technology transfer arrangement with Israel. It is expected to be commissioned after a month.

SIGNED: by Prime Minister Vajpayee six accords with the Emir of Qatar including an investment promotion and protection treaty and a double taxation avoidance agreement.

SIGHT & SOUND



MAYA KAMATH/THE ASIAN AGE

■ Sonia has prodded Jayalalitha into doing what she has, but both ladies are alike. Both go against majority opinion in their parties and have a habit of going back on their word.

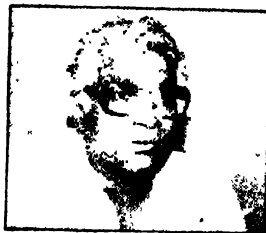
J. P. MATHUR, BJP spokesman

■ My only mission is to see that the BJP-led government is thrown out of power.

SUBRAMANIAN SWAMY, Janata Party president

■ India can't talk peace with Pakistan while pursuing a war against the Kashmiri people.

SARTAJ AZIZ, Pakistan foreign minister at the 55th session of the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva



■ A JPC on what? Does it mean that every officer who gets sacked picks up a politician and gets a JPC? He is just another officer as far as I and the navy are concerned.

GEORGE FERNANDES, defence minister, when asked why the government was refusing a JPC probe into Vishnu Bhagwat's dismissal

■ This is a miracle.

DEBASHISH MOHANTY, Orissa medium pacer, on his inclusion in the 15-member World Cup squad

■ I didn't know I was so popular. It sure felt good.

CARLOS MOYA, Spanish tennis ace, on the crowd support he got during the Gold Flake Open in Madras

■ Censorship is the privilege of the illiterate. It is only for people who have no sense of humour and who have a holier-than-thou attitude.

MAHABANOO MODY KOTWAL, actress

SEEN

When lawyers turn actors...

The stage is the court



A DIFFERENT BRIEF: Ajit Panja (centre) as Ramakrishna Paramahansa

It wasn't a courtroom drama. The 'men-in-black-robos' of Calcutta High Court held a different brief altogether—it had nothing to do with civil or criminal matters. There was no Bench to preside. Instead, a battery of high court advocates and barristers presented the play *Noti Binodini* to a full house at Kala Mandir in Calcutta. The play was part of the cultural programme organised by the Calcutta High Court Cultural and Philanthropic Society.

The cast included Trinamul MP and barrister Ajit Panja and the advocate-general of Tripura, Bikash Ranjan Bhattacharya. The audience: judges, members of the legal fraternity and city socialites.

What an evening! Holding court, we've heard, this was holding court on stage. And the response was fabulous: no one expected such competent performance.

A word about the play. It's based on the life of a brilliant actress of Bengali theatre, Binodini Dasi (1863-1941). Remember, in those times in conservative Bengal, there weren't many women who became actresses. Those who did were frowned upon as 'lasses of lesser vanity'. Noti Binodini belonged to the latter breed and, despite the social taboo, won a name for herself in the world of drama.

Early in her career, Binodini is noticed by Girish Ghosh (played by Indrajit Sarkar), a theatre legend of his times. It is Ghosh who helps Binodini (Ratna Sidhanta) mature into a powerful and popular actress.

Later, she persuades Ghosh and one of her lovers, Gurumukh Roy (Bikash Ranjan Bhattacharya), to build a theatre for her: it came to be known as Star Theatre.

At some point in her life, Binodini comes under Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa's (Ajit Panja) influence. Moved spiritually, she leaves the stage at the peak of her career.

Speaking about the play, Ajit Panja says, "Binodini was far ahead of her times. She wanted much more than her contemporaries were willing to grant." What about the actors? Panja smiles. "It was a different experience. Acting or narrating our parts was not too difficult. The only difference is that we did all that outside the courtroom."

Directed by lawyer Mihir Lal Bhattacharya, the team of legal players practised for a month at Room No. 8 of the high court. "It was fun considering that none of us are professional actors and actresses, but still we did manage to bring out the essence of the play," says Bikash Ranjan Bhattacharya.

He's right. At the end, many in the audience felt that the troupe should hold more shows and not vanish quietly into the night.

Wonder if John Grisham, best-selling legal fiction writer, was present. He could have used the 'lawyers-turned-actors' theme for his next legal twister. John, are you there? •

Arindam Sarkar/Calcutta

"Acting or narrating our parts was not too difficult. Only, we did all that outside the courtroom," says Ajit Panja

JAYA JAITLEY

Nowadays, secularism often goes hand in hand with fascist hysteria



The call of the Congress president to her party loudmouths to disrupt Parliament so that government cannot pass any legislation, including giving statutory powers to the

Central Vigilance Commission, the combination of the Left parties, haranguing those they have certified communal, and a speech of her tour operator Mani Shankar Aiyar calling for "secular fundamentalism" have together assumed the familiar tone of stomping jackboots. Political

Sabha MP from Madhya Pradesh who knows the truth will not speak out for fear of going against the party diktat. The "rape" in Orissa never took place. Intelligence reports and the medical officer of the Congress government in Orissa confirm that the wound was self-inflicted, the lady in question was fabricating the story and the whole thing was stage-managed for other reasons. The truth appeared in a single column, the lie was headlines on front pages. No other rapes took place anywhere but "Nuns Raped!" still resounds all over the world and secular fundamentalists have chosen to repeat the lie.

The other lie still doing the rounds is

Back to Goebbels

cal secularism, as opposed to true Indian secularism has recently assumed the hysteria of fascism. Sometimes, unfortunately, a section of the media joins in.

One of the attributes of fascism is to repeat a lie many times till, in public perception, it becomes the truth. The above-mentioned worthies never cease to scream about the rapes (plural, please note) of nuns during BJP rule. However, it is not BJP rule, but a coalition with partners who have different concerns and manifestos but are running the government according to the National Agenda for Governance. Secondly, four nuns were raped in Madhya Pradesh (under Congress rule) in which a CPM-led delegation and intelligence reports confirmed that 14 out of the 22 arrested were Christian tribals, all were local criminals and none were Hindu fundamentalists. It should not matter since all rapists are beasts, but even a woman Rajya

the famous statement attributed to George Fernandes about China being Enemy No. 1. For the truth, here is the transcript of the interview with Karan Thapar:

KT: Tell me something else then. As you see it, would you say that China is not just a threat that we've ignored for whatever reason but, in fact, it's the bigger of the two threats — the other being Pakistan?

GF: Well, if one looks at it purely in a clinical sense of the term — yes. But I believe that we also have talks with China currently going on ...

KT: So there is a second track to try and bring the situation under control?

GF: Yes.

KT: But if you don't use the second track then this is a worrying situation?

GF: Well even when you use the



second track one has to face the reality. I do not believe that in matters of safeguarding one's national frontiers, in matters of national security, one should only go by the fact that we are discussing things. One should also be ... all discussions can be conducted even while you are prepared to face any eventuality. And what I am pleading and what I have been pleading over these many years is that we should be prepared for any eventuality.

KT: OK, I want to talk about the eventuality but before I do — because that involves the hard tough decisions we mentioned a moment ago — let me put a blunt question to you. You are really saying, aren't



you, that the biggest threat comes from China not Pakistan?

GF: Well any person who is concerned about India's security must agree with that fact.

KT: Can I put it even more strongly? In a real sense, because we like naming things as something something No. 1, hero No. 1, actor No. 1, China is enemy No. 1?

GF: Well, to call China enemy No. 1 would be perhaps not appropriate at this point in time because China has not — at this moment as we are discussing this ...

KT: China is potential danger No. 1?

GF: Potential threat No. 1 shall we say?

KT: That's good enough for me.

One lie doing the rounds is George Fernandes' supposed remark about China being Enemy No. 1. Is it the diabolical intention of some to goad the Chinese into attacking the defence minister of their own country for something he never said?

To put an end to the lie is not convenient, and the latest adherent to the Goebbelsian principle is former Prime Minister Deve Gowda. Is it the diabolical intention of some of the worthies to goad the Chinese into attacking the defence minister of their own country for something he never said? Natwar Singh has recently demanded evidence of the fact that we have a larger strategic necessity in addressing our borders with

China and has planned to carry a counter message to Beijing on behalf of the Congress party. Does his denial of the truth include a refusal to read defence ministry reports presented before Parliament under five other defence ministers, including from his own party? Selectivity in addressing truth and twisting it to achieve power even at the cost of the nation's interest are strategies employed by fascists all over the world.

Remember M.J. Akbar's book *Riot after Riot*? When did all those riots take place? During Congress rule at the Centre and in most states. Number of churches burnt in Arunachal Pradesh during Congress rule in the state? Twenty-four, priests stripped naked, tonsured and paraded on the streets? Where? In Dumka district, Bihar. When? During Laloo Yadav's rule in 1997. There are now an average of four rapes a day in Bihar as well but these don't get headlines. The Steines murder took place in a Congress-ruled state and till date no evidence has surfaced linking it to the extremist fringe elements of the RSS/BJP. In 1984, Congress goons led by those who are still needed by the Congress president to mobilise votes in Delhi literally roasted alive nearly 4000 Sikhs and created a deep psychological trauma among thousands more. "*Khoon ka badla khoon*" was the slogan shouted by young men with white Congress caps speeding around in open tempos, only to be followed by the now famous justification. "When a big tree falls the earth will shake." For CPM veterans like Jyoti Basu, the beneficiaries of this naked fascism when Sikhs were singled out for

attack by mobs carrying electoral rolls to identify Sikh houses are now the only "secular" ones fit to rule. To quote him, the felling of the Babri Masjid was "barbaric and uncivilised".

True, but this happened in 1992 whereas in both Lok Sabha elections held since then the BJP has won the largest number of seats. Does Com. Basu imply that all their voters and those who voted for their allies are barbaric and

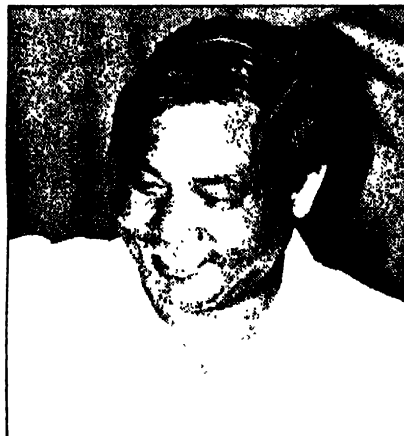


uncivilised? Atal Behari Vajpayee had apologised for the Babri Masjid in December 1992, but it took Sonia Gandhi 14 long years (the same time it took her to adopt Indian citizenship) to extend a grudging "let bygones be bygones" to the Sikhs. Perhaps the veteran CPM leader has different attitudes towards barbarism depending on who the perpetrators and victims are, and different attitudes towards rape depending on which party rules the state.

CALLING OUT THE lumpen to disturb processes and institutions crucial for civilised democratic functioning is a grim facet of fascism and should be of particular concern to Shri Purno Sangma who may remember the special session of Parliament that he called from August 15-18 in 1997. He drafted a resolution which every member of Parliament swore solemnly to uphold. It said "the prestige of Parliament be preserved and enhanced also by conscious and dignified conformity to the entire regime of Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business of the Houses and Directions of the Presiding Officers relating to orderly conduct of business, more especially by —

- * maintaining the inviolability of the Question Hour.
- * refraining from transgressing into the official areas of the House, or from any shouting of slogans, and
- * invariably desisting from any

Purno Sangma (below), who swore to preserve the prestige of Parliament, today remains silent as Sonia Gandhi orders her followers to stall proceedings in the Upper House



efforts at interruption or interference with the address of the President of the Republic."

Today he remains silent as his Italian-born party President orders her latest band of inner courtiers to prevent any

legislation from being passed by Parliament by stalling proceedings in the Upper House. If his efforts were genuine why is he now a helpless witness to the blatant violation of this solemn pledge by Congressmen who, for the first time ever in the past 50 years, stormed into the well of the Lok Sabha in March, 1999? His party stands sanctimoniously with the "secular" RJD who snatched the papers concerning the Women's Reservation Bill from the law minister's hands. The mask of aristocratic decency and civilised politics that Sonia Gandhi wore in the early months of 1998 has rapidly slipped, revealing a Godmother-like persona which no Congress person dare challenge.

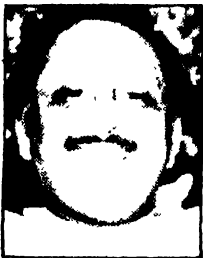
Political secularism that puts the "secular forces" i.e. the Congress and the Left together with the RLD today means making a cartoon of Salman Rushdie and lining up party workers to spit at it (Samajwadi Party, Mumbai); it means remaining silent about the plight of Tasleema Nasreen, a writer and fighter for women's rights, who was hounded out of her country by fundamentalists despite her mother being on her deathbed; it means choosing to brand President's Rule in Bihar as RSS governance thereby indirectly insulting the President of India and despite landless Dalits and small landowning upper caste corpses being strewn across its killing fields. It means betraying Bihar for the same reason in the hope of attracting the Muslim vote which looked as if it would evaporate after the highly emotive 48 hours of brotherhood extended by the Indian Prime Minister in Pakistan. A thousand Pakistanis watching cricket in Chandigarh is history that the Congress would like to obliterate by supporting fundamentalists in the name of secularism.

For Mani Shankar Aiyar, all this is not enough. More secular fundamentalism, he exhorts, not wishing to see the reality of the rest of India in its villages and small towns going about its business in a quiet manner of honest secularism that was born thousands of years ago and needs no politics or prompting to survive.

A sad but true footnote: On seeing me wearing a rust-orange Kanjeevaram sari at a wedding one of these secular fundamentalists caustically remarked, "Aha, saffron!" Having trashed the *Vande Mataram*, will they next resolve to obliterate the colour orange from our national flag? •

THE BATTLE WITHIN

South-West Block vs
North-East Block



It has been a traumatic year for the Sangh Parivar. Perhaps by the time this is published, Ms J. Jayalalitha, their staunch pre-poll ally, the Partner with a Difference, would have put the *parivar* out of its misery by a much-needed touch of euthanasia. Perhaps not. Why speculate about it when, as I say, by the time this piece is out, you and I and everyone will know? My sympathies will be

with Vajpayee only if by then he is not out. For to subject himself to this diurnal humiliation is surely not what our most distinguished gentleman-politician deserves. He has richly earned the right to a dignified retirement. He should be given it.

The Sangh Parivar will be delighted if the Vajpayee government falls. For that is the only way Advani can be put at the



The BJP PM believed passionately in the agenda of the ersatz secularists and not at all in the agenda of the Hindutvists. Advani is convinced that it is only Hindutva which can bring the BJP to power on its own. But he can get on with his agenda only after getting Vajpayee out





RATH YATRA

helm to steer the ship of Hindutva. When, in 1980, the BJP was constituted out of the debris of the Janata Party, Vajpayee was chosen as its first president. That was the first betrayal. For, instead of baying for minority blood and unfurling saffron flags over every "disputed structure", which is what the *parivar* wanted, Vajpayee nailed his mast to the curious doctrine of "Gandhian socialism". For a party that for decades had hurled itself against godless socialism and poisoned the atmosphere in which the editor of *Hindu Rashtra* assassinated the Father of the Nation in the cause of the Hindu Rashtra, marrying Gandhi to socialism was apostasy indeed. And for this breach of Hindutva protocol, Vajpayee suffered grievous retribution. "Gandhian socialism" led to such an utter rout at the polls in 1984 that the BJP was left with 2 seats in the Lok Sabha, Vajpayee himself being worsted by a local maharajah in Gwalior, the town which, decades earlier, had nurtured in his political infancy the first president of the BJP. "Gandhian socialism" was what marked out Atal Behari as a Gandhi *manque* — both in the sense of the Mahatma and of Indira Gandhi.

IT WAS PARTY president Vajpayee's defeat in 1984 that gave Advani his opportunity, just as it is Prime Minister Vajpayee's impending defeat that is going to give Advani his next opportunity. For once Jayalalitha puts paid to the Vajpayee government, the Sangh Parivar will give tongue to the love that, for the nonce, dare not speak its name, viz., Lal Krishna Advani. It has always been Advani who had given the *parivar* its roller-coaster thrills. He it was who re-invented Ayodhya. His was the *rath* that rolled out of Somnath. He it was who challenged the pseudo-secularists. He who presided

as the Babri Masjid (a.k.a. "disputed structure") was vandalised brick-by-brick. He who went to jail for the cause (while Vajpayee took off for London for a spot of R&R). He who still has a criminal case pending against him — the only sitting MP, now that Phoolan Devi has moved on, to be charged with criminality in a court of law, the only law-breaker to have made it to home minister. Advani it was who took the BJP from 2 to 88, and then 110, and now 180 seats. And then was cheated of his rightful residence at Race Course Road by a Congressman in saffron. Cheated of the glory, moreover, by a man who worshipped Jawaharlal Nehru, deified Indira as Durga, and took air-tickets from the likes of Narasimha Rao to rush off to New York and Geneva instead of pouring votive offerings into the Sangh Parivar's political *havan*. Perhaps — although this must remain one of the best-kept secrets of our politics — also the man who did not plead sincerely enough with Advani to remain in Parliament when allegations were rife of Advani having been caught with his hand in Jain's Havala till.

Advani is convinced that it is only Hindutva which can bring the BJP to power on its own. Moreover, Advani, for all that he is a practical politician, does not see the point in assuming office to implement someone else's programme. Vajpayee has no such difficulty because his agenda is, in any case, not the Sangh Parivar's. He understands that if the BJP got its first 100 seats through fanaticism, its next 50 came through moderation, and that the 100 more it needs to come to power can only be secured through secularism. Advani points out that, if that is so, then the first 100 seats will slip out of the BJP's hands just as the last 100 are being gathered in. Therefore, it is *raths* and more *raths*, not a paler shade of saffron, that is Advani's preferred road to advancement.



BABRI MASJID

It has always been Advani who had given the *parivar* its roller-coaster thrills.

He it was who re-invented Ayodhya. His was the *rath* that rolled out of Somnath.

He it was who challenged the pseudo-secularists. He who presided as the Babri Masjid was vandalised brick-by-brick



KAR SEVA AT AYODHYA

HOWEVER, ADVANI CAN get on with his agenda only after getting Vajpayee out of the way. In an era of coalition politics, it was clear that until the BJP acquired the strength (that is, the extra 100 seats) to make a bid for power on its own, compromise would be essential to climb Raisina Hill on the shoulders of non-finicky secularists. Vajpayee was, therefore, wheeled in as the human face of Hindutva.

The problem was the BJP Prime Minister believed passionately in the agenda of the ersatz secularists — and not at all in the agenda of the Hindutvists. Thus, instead of converting the allies to the BJP cause, it was the BJP under Vajpayee that was getting converted to the non-Hindutvist cause.

Escape from this dilemma required manufacturing a crisis. Enter Rangarajan Kumaramangalam. He attends a press conference for Persons-of-Indian-Origin identity cards, a document Persons-of-Congress Origin are not required to carry. His ministry of power has nothing to do with any Persons of Indian Origin (other than the Hinduja's, of course). But there is Kumaramangalam, grinning into the cameras from ear to ear. The damp squib of the PIO press conference over, Kumaramangalam gets busy rounding up media persons, especially of the electronic kind, to spin out his one-liners carefully made up in advance — and doubtless cleared with Sangh Parivar agents in advance.

The detritus hits the ceiling. Jayalalitha is left with no option. She has to quit the government — or forever hold her peace. Her walkout will, of course, lead to Vajpayee's farewell. But it is only Ta-Ta-Bye-Bye to Vajpayee that will lead to a walk-in for Advani. Give me a trusted *trishul*, quoth he, and I shall lead thee to the very Kailash of power. Vajpayee is going so that Advani can lead a saffron campaign of the maximum viciousness. Advani has convinced himself that with Hindutva emblazoned on the BJP standard, he can lead the party to the extra 100 seats it needs just as his *rath*, like some *udan khatola*, took the BJP from Vajpayee's miserable 2 to his own astonishing 110.

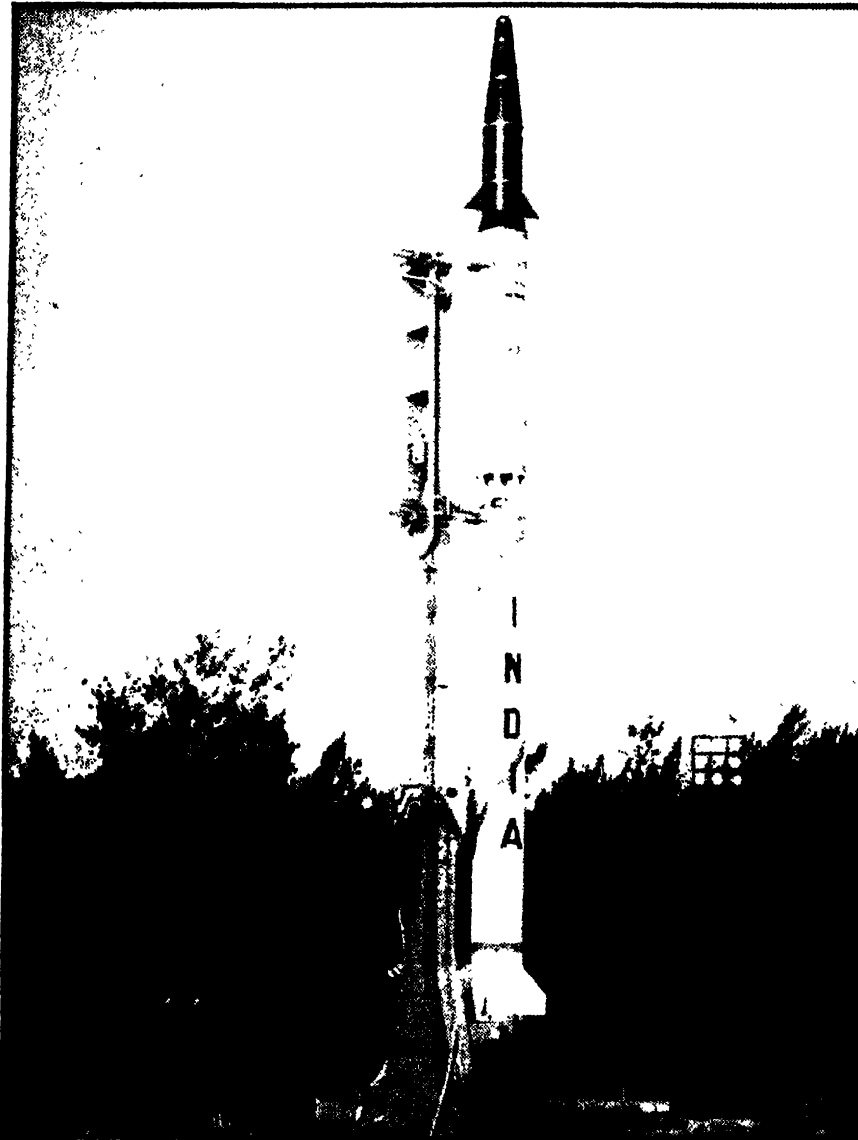
JAYALALITHA WOULD BE less than honest to herself, there-

fore, were she to imagine that it is she who has brought down this government. The credit for that goes to Advani and the Sangh Parivar who have provoked the end of Vajpayee in the western corner of South Block to open the doors to Advani in the eastern corner of North Block.

The *mukhauta* is ripped off and Hindutva is the name of the game. The Hindu Jagran Manch has shown us what Hindutva has in store for the country. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad's Dharma Sansad (Parliament of Righteousness) in Ahmedabad last February spelt out the agenda for an Advani-led Parliament in Delhi. The Swadeshi Jagran Manch has shown the *parivar* the economic future beyond Yashwant Sinha. So has Dattopant Thengadi's Bharatiya Mazdoor Sabha.

Brooding over this endgame is the RSS, which scripted it to answer Vajpayee's sneering at the Bangalore national executive meeting of the BJP last January. Vajpayee thought he had got the better of them when on the advice of the BJP journalist brigade — Prabhu Chawla, Swapan Dasgupta *et al* — he decided to tick off the RSS and show that he too could rule. *Vinasha kale viparita buddhi*. Or, as the Greeks used to say: "Those whom the gods wish to destroy, they first make read *India Today*." And thus comes the Vajpayee era to an end — with a whimper, as the Prime Minister sobs himself out of history. •

Agni Pariksha



Agni II missile being test fired: bolstering national security

By all accounts, the scientists of the integrated missile development programme have scored a bull's eye: a totally fault-free launch and a perfect 11 minutes tracking of the missile from launch to its designated point of impact more than 2,000 kms away

India successfully launches Agni II missile

On the sidelines during the eighth round of Strobe Talbott-Jaswant Singh Indo-US strategic dialogue in Delhi early this year, an important utterance went unnoticed. The India International Centre (IIC) arranged an informal off-the-record exchange between the Talbott team and leading defence and strategic affairs experts. Talbott reaffirmed that the strategic dialogue had been narrowed down to reconciling US' non-proliferation concerns with India's security concerns.

It was at the IIC that Gen. Joe Ralston, deputy chairman joint chiefs of staff, made this casual but fateful pronouncement: "The US has no difficulty with India's missile testing..." It is clear now as it was then, that the US side was speaking to different audiences in different voices.

The successful launch last week of the Extended Range version of IRBM Agni II may be 'out of step' with the restraint parameters outlined by the US; but is certainly one step forward by India in making its minimum nuclear deterrent credible. Nuclear capability consists of the weapon system and the delivery vehicle. Pokhran II gave birth to the weapon, Agni II is the delivery vehicle which will carry the bomb to its designated target.

Eleventh April, 1999, will be hailed as the day India's security managers provided the coupling for its weaponisation. Like after the nuclear tests, it was announced (in this case, by George Fernandes) there would be no more missile tests. This was a political statement of restraint, certainly not tenable with the overall missile development programme. To test and perfect a missile in the IRBM class, at least half-a-dozen tests are required.

Agni II has come five years after Agni I which fell victim to external pressures in February 1994 after completing just three tests. Once again, for reasons of restraint, the government had called it a technology demonstrator like Pokhran I was called a peaceful nuclear explosion. Previous governments went through excruciatingly painful explanations for halting the Agni programme, though this was never admitted officially.

By all accounts, the scientists of the integrated missile development programme have scored a bull's-eye: a totally fault-free launch and a perfect 11 minutes tracking of the missile from launch to its designated point of impact

ing restraint on Agni in the same way 24 years were frittered away sitting on the fence at Pokhran. Although a moratorium has been declared on additional missile tests, it can no doubt be revoked in supreme national interest.

For deterrence to be more versatile, ranges upto 5,000 km in the IRBM class have to be achieved. It is altogether another question of attaining ICBM and submarine launch capacities in the next millennium.

The timing of the Agni Pariksha will encourage the opposition to accuse the government on the brink of collapse of using the missile tests to bolster its security rather than that of the country. The

The most vociferous and vitriolic reaction will be China's because it is China that is sought to be brought within the deterrence reach following the Agni test. Until now, Mainland China was outside the strategic reach of India's minimum nuclear deterrent. Even now, permutations of payload and deployment will be required to extend the reach of the Agni.

The Agni is designed to carry a 1 tonne thermo-nuclear warhead or a boosted fission warhead. By reducing the payload to around 500 kg, Agni II can target the outskirts of Beijing and Shanghai.

When India named China as the main reason for its nuclear test last May, China was enraged at this public declaration of its threat potential. It saw India poisoning the West with such ideas. But the real reason for China's pique was India challenging its nuclear hegemony in Asia. The missile test will drive this point all the way across Tibet to the Chinese mainland.

Reports have already begun appearing about Chinese deploying missiles in Tibet targeting India following the nuclear tests. This process is bound to be hastened.

In the short term, the Agni tests will hot up the multiple war of words between India and the US, India and Pakistan and India and China. The prospect for the 10th round of JWG with China already delayed by a year, may become a non-starter. Similarly, the prospect of a ministerial visit to China in the near term also seems unlikely.

It has taken the rest of the world about a year to come to terms with India's nuclear capability. The missile test is likely to blow away much sooner than the fall out of the nuclear tests.

Buoyed by the successful demolition job on Bhagwat, George Fernandes was in an uncompromising mood at his press briefing, unfurling the Agni flag. He said the successful missile test has added a new dimension to India's defence capabilities and was evidence of the government's determination not to compromise on national security. Now no one from any quarter will dare to threaten us, he added.

Having demonstrated both the weapon and the delivery system, India can show its restraint a) by not mating the two and b) by not deploying the Agni. It will add credence to its policy of No First Use. •

Maj. Gen. Ashok K. Mehta/New Delhi



George Fernandes: the defence minister said that the test added a new dimension to India's defence capabilities

more than 2,000 kms away. The 16-foot long missile carrying a Global Positioning System was launched from a new test site — Inner Wheeler Island, off the Orissa coast.

The missile has mobile launch capability and can be deployed in rugged terrain (read mountains). Another qualitative jump is the solid-solid (instead of liquid-solid) A201 configuration of the missile. Both the re-entry technology and the circular error of probability were described as per design parameters and a quantum technology jump.

The operationalisation of the Agni II has come after several years of needling by the strategic affairs community. Five valuable years were wasted demonstrat-

reaction to the test has been along expected lines.

The US, in breach of the UN Charter and international norms while pounding targets in Yugoslavia with its multiple array of missiles, has expressed "regret" and would like to see "tangible indication of restraint".

Pakistan, which in accordance with the Lahore declaration, was informed in advance of the Agni test has indicated that it will be forced to give a 'befitting response'. Pakistan has tested IRBM class of the North Korean missile it has named Shaheen. But the question is: why should it invest a 3 million dollar-missile in a tit for tat response? Only public pressure can force it to do so.

BJP-ADMK: the



way we were

But Jayalalitha is like this only

When ADMK supremo Jayalalitha and the BJP struck a deal to become electoral allies, at least one person was certain it wouldn't last. "At last," breathed TMC leader Jayanthi Natarajan with quiet satisfaction, "someone else will now have to deal with her tantrums and her moods. We've put up with it for so many years. Let others get a taste of it now."

Natarajan was talking of Jayalalitha's special qualities: her caprice, her demanding and wilful nature. And now that the year-old BJP-ADMK alliance is virtually on the rocks, Natarajan's prophecy sounds prescient.

"Our relationship now is like the six-month separation period in a marriage. We know it will end in divorce," said information minister Pramod Mahajan last week, as Jayalalitha pulled out two ministers from the BJP government and threatened to withdraw support from the Vajpayee government altogether, plunging the government into a serious crisis of numerical strength in Parliament. Though the BJP was confident of weathering the storm, they were recalling advice given to them by various well-wishers and wishing they'd acted on it.

Just last March, Jayalalitha had come to Delhi and brought shawls for Atal Behari Vajpayee and L.K. Advani, in keeping with the Indian custom of honouring public figures. On that occasion, she had said that she wanted only that the BJP government should be stable and steady. She was putting no conditions to her support, not even that M. Karunanidhi's government be dismissed.

But in the one action-packed, fractious year that followed, Jayalalitha demonstrated to the world that with 18 MPs, you could hold the Indian government to ransom. If it was not the cases against her, it was the faces of those who were ministers. If it wasn't that, it was that someone was doing their job too effectively, or not at all, or doing it all wrong. The BJP lurched from side to side under her criticism. L.K. Advani didn't know how to handle the home ministry, Ram Jethmalani and R.K. Hegde were ministers with charges of corruption against them, George Fernandes was a security risk who should be removed to

The BJP lurched from side to side under Jaya's criticisms



L.K. ADVANI didn't know how to handle the home ministry



Ram Jethmalani and R.K. HEGDE were ministers with charges of corruption against them



GEORGE FERNANDES was a security risk who should be removed to some other ministry ...and so on

some other ministry, Rangarajan Kumaramangalam was an ungrateful little tyke who owed his seat to her support and help and now had the cheek to criticise her...and so on.

But this time she may have overplayed her hand. With the BJP's contingency plan to ensure numerical support for itself even though she hadn't withdrawn support to the government at the time of writing, Jayalalitha has painted herself into a corner. Her support is useful but not indispensable to the BJP. And the Congress, the other ally she could have turned to, is calculatedly indifferent to her overtures.

So brinkmanship has its limits after all, as a means of politics.

Jayalalitha should know everything about brinkmanship and riding contradictions. She has been doing so for most of her personal and political life. She has been acting in films since she was a little girl, and from all accounts, hated it. Her mother Sandhya, a bit actress in Tamil films, would drag her young daughter along on shoots where Jayalalitha would watch from the wings and long for a normal, sedate childhood like other girls of her age. She was seven, and already an actress. This continued for most of her adult life. Others wrote the scripts. She didn't want to, but she went along with it.

Like M.G. Ramachandran, MGR saw her performance in *Venneera Adai Nirmala* — the story of a woman who believes she is a widow though she is not married (want any more proof of contradiction ruling Jayalalitha's life?). This was her first Tamil film and he was so impressed with



At the tea party hosted by Subramanian Swamy



JAYALALITHA AND THE BJP: troubled relations

JANUARY 1998

- Jayalalitha and L.K. Advani share a dais at the ADMK silver jubilee conference. Jayalalitha says she has allied with the BJP to fight the elections "to protect the interests of Tamil Nadu". She says when the DMK government foisted cases on her and jailed her, it was the BJP which spoke up for her, not the Congress. She also says the BJP is not a communal party, and the only one which will provide stability to the government.

JANUARY 1998

- The ADMK and the BJP have their first scrap. Though they agree to fight the Lok Sabha elections as allies, the BJP unilaterally announces the name of four candidates, which irritates the ADMK. The BJP apologises to Jayalalitha. The alliance is threatened even before it takes off the ground.

MARCH 1998

- Jayalalitha presents shawls to Advani and



SONIA GANDHI

Vajpayee. She says there is no time limit for the dismissal of the DMK government.

MARCH 1998

- The President asks to see documentary proof of the allies' support to the Vajpayee government. All the letters are sent to the President, except those of the allies from Tamil Nadu. Subramanian Swamy gets into the act and says the RSS is blocking his appointment as finance minister. Jayalalitha denies that she had insisted on key portfolios to her allies or the dismissal of the DMK government as a precondition for extending support. She charges the BJP with a "negative attitude".

MARCH 1998

- Jaswant Singh goes to Madras and shows her the National Agenda for Governance, which covers all her demands. He also tells



her that she soon became the only heroine he was willing to act with.

Jayalalitha was to write later in her biography (which was published in a serialised form in Cho Ramaswamy's magazine *Thuglaq*) that she didn't want to be a film actress. All she wanted was to continue studying at Stella Maris College, Madras, get a law degree and become a professional woman. But MGR was at the peak of his acting career. How could anyone say 'no' to him? So, once again, she compromised.

As it turned out, this wasn't a good move. Although her natural intelligence shone through, and observing this, MGR made her propaganda secretary of the ADMK in 1982, she found it impossible to keep up with the conniving and scheming that masqueraded for politics. When MGR felt that she was getting so popular that she might easily overtake him, he decided to clip her wings and sent her to Delhi as a Rajya Sabha MP. Once again, Jayalalitha found herself lonely, unhappy and wondering why she was always doing things she didn't want to do.

When MGR died, things turned for the worse. In the tussle between his wife Janaki and Jayalalitha, the Congress decided to back Janaki. The party, sensing the wind, stayed with Janaki. For the party, this was a big mistake, as it later turned out. Jayalalitha, with the rump of the ADMK, tried to rebuild it, her distaste and contempt at fawning politicians growing by the day.

It is during those years — when she was forced off MGR's cortege on the guncarriage, when the Congress rejected and humiliated her, when the ADMK was nearly

her that if she is content to let the shaky government fall even before it is set up, it's no skin off the BJP's nose. The allies have had their first major fight. But Jayalalitha relents. The Vajpayee Cabinet is formed with R.K. Kumar of the ADMK in place in the ministry of finance, having assumed his post even before the formal allocation-of-work order has been issued.

APRIL 1998

• S.R. Muthiah, one of the ministers who is charged with corruption in court, is asked to resign by the BJP. Now, Jayalalitha says all ministers charged with corruption in the BJP government must quit — like Ram Jethmalani and R.K. Hegde. There could not be one rule for the ADMK and one for the other allies. Meanwhile, Jethmalani and Hegde tear into Jayalalitha and Subramanian Swamy.

JUNE 1998

• Jayalalitha boycotts a meeting of the



BAL THACKERAY

coordinating council of allies, pleading health problems, but attacks Advani and the central government with selective amnesia about the promise to dismiss the DMK government. Advani says he can't remember when the central government promised Jaya he would sack the DMK government.

JULY 1998

• The ADMK continues its war of attrition in Parliament by walking out on all issues concerning Tamil Nadu. Jayalalitha meets Vajpayee to impress upon him the need to impose Article 356. Vajpayee says he can't sack the DMK government in Tamil Nadu without some good reason. ADMK MPs tell Jayalalitha there is no point in being an ally with the government which is so helpless. Jayalalitha herself says she will do nothing hasty, such as withdrawing support to the BJP government, and says her actions will be "measured and in the interest of the people of Tamil Nadu"

(continued)

JAYALALITHA AND THE BJP: troubled relations

AUGUST 1998

- There is an understanding between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu over the Cauvery waters issue. Jayalalitha says the new agreement for the division of water is unfair to Tamil Nadu and must be reversed. In the meantime, the enforcement director is transferred. She criticises the government for making it appear as if this was done at her behest. She claims "a person very close to the PMO" was paid large bribes "by the owners of a well-known media house" to get the enforcement director shifted.

SEPTEMBER 1998

- Its allies move away from the ADMK. The MDMK holds a rally to which Jayalalitha is not invited. George Fernandes, Farooq Abdullah and a host of other central leaders attend it.

OCTOBER 1998

- The central government tries to impose President's Rule in Bihar, but is turned down by the President. Jayalalitha says there is all the more reason why President's Rule should be imposed in Tamil Nadu.

NOVEMBER 1998

- All the allies revolt against Jayalalitha. She wants Vazhapadi Ramamurthy's (Tamil Rajiv Congress) portfolio to be taken away and given to law minister Thambidurai. Vajpayee refuses. To this, Pattali Makkal Katchi leader Dr S. Ramdoss says it is unheard of for any ally to try and snatch the portfolio of another ally. If Jayalalitha's given that portfolio, the PMK would resign from the government.

DECEMBER 1998

- The ADMK takes part in the Opposition-sponsored strike to protest the economic policies of the BJP government. Jayalalitha congratulates Sonia Gandhi for the 33 per cent reservation for women in party posts. She also meets Mani Shankar Aiyar in Hyderabad.

JANUARY 1999

- Jayalalitha says she reserves the right to



JASWANT SINGH

criticise the government on issues and blasts the government for the dismissal of CNS Vishnu Bhagwat. She also criticises the government's inability to prevent Shiv Sena supremo Bal Thackeray from issuing irresponsible threats about disrupting Indo-Pak cricket matches.

FEBRUARY 1999

- Jayalalitha boycotts the meeting of the coordination council of government allies in Delhi. She refuses to sign the committee's joint statement. She also criticises the government for increasing prices of essential commodities without consulting all the parties. She says ominously that though she was not withdrawing support to the government just yet, she would "take an appropriate decision at the appropriate time".

MARCH 1999

- The BJP state unit has a conference in Trichy which the PM attends. Jayalalitha boycotts it.

MARCH-APRIL 1999:

- Jayalalitha says Vishnu Bhagwat must be reinstated and demands Fernandes be moved elsewhere because he is a security risk to the country. Vajpayee rejects the demand. For the first time, the BJP hits out at Jayalalitha's 'unreasonableness'. She retaliates by withdrawing her ministers from the government and attending a tea party at which Sonia Gandhi is also a guest. The next step? She will withdraw support from the BJP government. There are predictions that the BJP-led government will fall. But the Congress counsels prudence.



RAM JETHMALANI



SUBRAMANIAN SWAMY

wiped out from Tamil Nadu and M. Karunanidhi made dire predictions about her future — that Jayalalitha thought politically it was endgame for her.

But more was to come. Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated, Karunanidhi was wiped out in the Assembly elections and she came to power, becoming chief minister. This time, Jayalalitha was determined to avenge all the wrongs done to her. From believing she'd lost everything, she now found she'd got everything. Including her now dearest friend, Sasikala.

If the enforcement director and the income tax department are to be believed, Jayalalitha's reign as chief minister was one during which Jayalalitha did everything to make sure she would never be poor again. There are, today, eight cases against Jayalalitha personally, of corruption, several cases in which she and her friend Sasikala have been charged together, several cases where there are charges of violation of foreign exchange laws against them individually and together.

In the eight corruption cases against Jayalalitha, charges have been framed in the special courts in four. She is charged with having wealth disproportionate to her known assets (while she was chief minister she accepted a salary of Re 1 per month, but has assets which far surpass this). As CM, she is charged with having given the contract for procuring colour TV sets for Tamil Nadu Panchayat to a company she herself owned. She is also charged with using her position to amend the land-use rules in Ooty to permit the Pleasant Stay Hotel to build beyond regulations. In other cases (the TANSI and the coal import case), the police have filed charge-sheets but the special judges are still to consider them.

There are other, far more serious charges of FERA

From believing she'd lost everything, she now found she'd got everything. Including her now dearest friend, Sasikala



Jayalalitha on MGR's gun carriage

In the tussle between his wife Janaki and Jayalalitha after MGR's death, the Congress decided to back Janaki. For the party, this was a big mistake, as it later turned out

violations against her and Sasikala. As director of JJ Television, Sasikala has spent a term in prison for not taking permission from the Reserve Bank of India, to hire from US firm RIMSAT on payment of US\$ 500,000, a transponder and paying US\$ 180,000 to a Philippines firm for uplinking. This is serious money and these are serious charges.

You could argue that Sasikala has nothing to do with Jayalalitha. But the cases are there. And if that is the case, why does Jayalalitha keep interfering and doing everything possible to delay their passage in court?

If truth be told this is the main reason for the tension in ADMK-BJP relations. Every minister who has gone to Madras to talk to Jayalalitha on behalf of the BJP has come back and reported as much: whether it is George Fernandes or L.K. Advani or Pramod Mahajan or Jaswant Singh or Murli Manohar Joshi. They all say that she wants the cases against her cancelled.

The BJP says this is impossible. Cases can be slowed down, they can be adjudicated. But in many cases, prosecution has been ordered by the finance ministry. How can you adjudicate once you order prosecution?

The BJP now says it believes in Karma: that the deeds you do catch up with you. And with Jayalalitha, imprisonment again is strongly on the cards. Which is why she keeps spelling out the other conditions she has: that the DMK government which is responsible for harassing her,



PRAMOD MAHAJAN

● The architect of Op Save The Government. Except for a brief period when he was battling the crisis in Maharashtra, he was hands-on, trying to get the DMK in line and make the numbers add up.

Atal Behari Vajpayee's CRISIS MANAGERS

RANGARAJAN KUMARAMANGALAM

● Stepped in to keep the ministries going. Is now in the proud possession of four portfolios, including one that ADMK minister Thambidurai gave up. However, had parliamentary numbers at his fingertips.

GOVINDACHARYA

● Went to Madras and tried to talk to Karunanidhi. But

couldn't get past Murasoli Maran. Still, for the record, he tried to save the government.

KALRAJ MISHRA

● Has all but agreed to accept Mayawati as a deputy chief minister and become chief minister of UP himself, so that the BSP can then extend support to the government at the Centre.

MADAN LAL KHURANA

● Self-appointed manager who tried to win



over the Indian National Lok Dal. He reported that his mission wasn't successful; and then proceeded to detail his own tales of woe. Came in to save the government, went out trying to save himself.

be dismissed, and P. Chidambaram, the former finance minister who was responsible for her first prison term, is himself put in jail.

But the BJP has had enough of Jayalalitha. They say that she is now the Congress's responsibility. The Congress would like to wait and see before taking a decision: opening the door to Jayalalitha would mean closing it to the TMC. And winding up the Congress — such as it is — in Tamil Nadu.

But Jayalalitha is not backing down. She has always had options forced upon her — professionally and personally. She wanted to get married and have children. But the only man she was in love with — Sobhan Babu, the Telugu film actor — turned tail and ran back to his wife. She wanted to become a lawyer. She finds she is now fighting the law. She wanted to be rich and happy. She is wealthy but money has brought her little happiness. She wanted to be powerful. But small men are opposing her will and suborning her at every stage.

Where does all this leave the Queen of Contradictions? What Jayalalitha does is always thought-out, reasoned and logical. But you have to grasp the internal working of the logic — her logic. She wants to save the world. But she has to save herself before she can do that: from the law, from her adversaries, from those who want to take her party away from her.

The DMK and TMC are regrouping. All Jayalalitha's attempts to give the ADMK national character — whether it is attending lectures on women's issues in Delhi or consulting soldiers at USI — will have no meaning until she can get people to take her seriously. This is proving to be a difficult exercise.

In the next one year, Jayalalitha is going to be a terribly



M. Karunanidhi

For Jayalalitha, imprisonment again is strongly on the cards. Which is why she keeps demanding that the DMK government which is responsible for harassing her, be dismissed

harried woman. Her demands will grow. If the Congress is considering doing a deal with her, it would be well-advised to go into it with its eyes open. For the cases are not going to go away. And nor will the DMK, which will push them towards prosecution.

What is inexplicable is Jayalalitha's own resolve to commit harakiri. What was the point of calling Sonia Gandhi 'a foreigner' and warning the country that unless it wanted an Italian Prime Minister, it should vote for the BJP? Surely as a smart politician she should have known that she has to keep her eggs in more than one basket?

It is hard to understand. But then justifying this contradiction — trying to turn a friend into an enemy by making gratuitous attacks — will not be particularly difficult for Jayalalitha. She's a pro at it.

Aditi Phadnis/New Delhi and Sreedhar Pillai/Madras

Victim of numbers

Yet it's the BJP which has the mandate to rule

"Raja ratra wairenchi aahe jaga rahe (O King! The night is pregnant with the evil design of enemies, be alert)." This suggestion to Shivaji's son Sambhaji by his spiritual teacher is also appropriate for Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

From the beginning of the coalition experiment it was apparent that Jayalalitha's personal agenda would not allow the government to reach its full potential of strength and stability. She kept the BJP and the President of India waiting for her decision to support the government. She has also kept people guessing about the withdrawal of support. Rangarajan Kumaramangalam's statement proved to be the final blow to her patience. She was made to realise that the BJP wasn't going to put up with her anymore. The question now is: where will she go?

Jayalalitha has the honour of commanding a fortunate 18. Yet she finds herself devalued. But then whose fault is that? Her own credibility is at an all-time low. She behaves like a film heroine who does not intend to leave her hero but forces him to carry out her every whim threatening to leave him. In the given circumstances, maybe Vajpayee is unfit to star in the same movie as her!

One reason for the contradiction of her situation is the nature of India's federal polity. Sharing a platform with Jayalalitha would mean an irreparable loss. And yet, Jayalalitha's all-India perspective makes her a natural ally of the BJP. Remember the National Integration Council meeting where she spoke on the Ram Janmabhoomi virtually making common cause with the Hindutva forces?

But nothing is static. The BJP's liberal language policy and proven democratic credentials have improved its acceptability with the DMK. Vajpayee has stood firm in the face of acute pressure from Jayalalitha to dismiss the DMK government in Tamil Nadu.

During his 13-day tenure, the BJP was hopeful of DMK support and was sorry to be disappointed. But speaking on the no-confidence motion, DMK

leader Murasoli Maran praised the BJP for not indulging in horse-trading.

The Congress gentlemen who are now rallying behind Sonia Gandhi were party to the great 'democratic deficit' which the nation experienced during the P.V. Narasimha Rao regime. It was bribes given to the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha which kept the government alive. So, the Congress is certainly not qualified

This storm will blow over. But the BJP will not survive another storm unless it learns the lessons from this one. Sonia Gandhi is by no means the passive goddess of the Congress. She will wait until the Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh Assembly elections and then strike. In this she will be aided and abetted by the CPI(M) led by Harkishen Singh Surjeet who is more a Congressman than a



The PMO failed to carry out its basic role as an advisory and coordinating body. It has now been proven beyond doubt that Vajpayee minus PMO is more powerful than Vajpayee plus PMO

ed to take the moral high ground.

There are a hundred things for which the BJP can be blamed. But horse-trading is not one of them. Actually, the BJP failed to utilise its allies properly and fight the Opposition's conspiracy. The PMO failed to carry out its role as an advisory and coordinating body. It has now been proven beyond doubt that Vajpayee minus PMO is more powerful than Vajpayee plus PMO.

Neither the media nor the important allies were handled with skill. The potential of Maneka Gandhi, Mamata Banerjee and Ramakrishna Hegde has been unutilised and Chandrababu Naidu's potential was not even explored.

Marxist.

But everyone has to remember that India is still a parliamentary democracy and that parliamentary democracy is a great respecter of numbers. The BJP is a victim of numbers. Equally, if anyone else tries to cobble together a government from this Lok Sabha, it would be a government formed by defection. The Congress should remember that it is the BJP which has the mandate to rule and the Congress which has a mandate to oppose. If it wants a chance to rule, it must get a fresh mandate. •

(The author teaches at Delhi University and is associated with the sangh parivar)

Saving Premier Vajpayee

Even the RSS speaks in different voices if the situation warrants



Atal Behari Vajpayee: getting organisational sympathy

It has been the classic case of the Big Brother taking a beating and hanging on to the coat-tails of the younger one. Almost in desperation. At least, that is what camp followers of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee would like one to believe. But, there is no denying that regardless of the manner in which the crisis following Jayalalitha's exit from the BJP coalition is resolved, Vajpayee has finally managed to rein in the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.

The charitable to the RSS, however, would find different ways of explaining the sudden turnaround that has come in the attitude of the RSS towards the government in general and the Prime Minister in particular. It would be pointed out that the nature of threat perception has altered following conspiracies of various kinds coming to the fore. It would also be argued that there was never any real difference in approach and that the bickering was merely over emphasis.

Whichever way one sees it, there is no denying that the ever-tense relationship between Vajpayee and Nagpur has turned the corner yet again. From a time barely few weeks ago when senior RSS functionaries missed no opportunity in embarrassing the government, it is now time for all the good men to come to the rescue of the beleaguered party and thereby the leader.

The mandatory sceptical remarks have thus been replaced by laudatory statements and it comes as no surprise that RSS spokesmen have wasted no opportunity in highlighting the government's success with Big Bs: bomb, bus, Budget and Bihar.

From the time Vajpayee made a lateral shift to the *sangh parivar* from the communist-dominated All India Students Federation as the new kid on the block — first as founding editor of RSS

Hindi mouthpiece *Panchjanya* and later as parliamentary orator par excellence, he has always been the odd man out.

An unconventional lifestyle and a penchant for being his own master were always difficult to accept for the conservative leadership. Yet, there was little option for the two, as both needed each other. If Vajpayee's unmatched charisma was needed to sparkle the faceless organisation, then Vajpayee needed the steel of the frame to realise personal ambitions.

When Vajpayee took oath as leader of a multi-party coalition last year, the RSS felt that its long wait for power was over and that the government could be controlled by remote control by the apparatchik sitting behind the scenes. Exuberance was in ample evidence and the government was viewed as little more than just another adjunct of the Sangh.

Names that had meant little to people outside the RSS fraternity assumed great importance overnight. It suddenly appeared that the real boss did not preside from South Block in the capital but instead operated out of the austere Keshav Kunj that houses the RSS local office in Delhi.

But a clash was inevitable, as having the image of a feeble Prime Minister browbeaten both by insiders and allies was not acceptable to Vajpayee beyond a point. The fightback thus started late last year, a process that was helped by numerous factors including the tense ties between Vajpayee and Advani.

What however has come as a surprise is the complete turnaround in the RSS stance. In many ways it indicates that from the beginning, the RSS overestimated its strength and all that was needed to neutralise its belligerence was a patient leader — something that Vajpayee has demonstrated himself to be.

But, there have been indications that the decision to put off the face-off between significant sections of the RSS and Vajpayee has been accompanied by reduction of tension between the Prime Minister and his redoubtable home minister. For the first time since the BJP government assumed office, Advani and Vajpayee have been seen as partners managing a common crisis and not as adversaries trying to better each other.

This will have a long-term impact as any improvement in ties between the two will have repercussions within the internal equation in the BJP. For

starters, it is likely to indicate Advani taking greater interest in party affairs with a view to eventually taking full charge of the organisation once again. This development would spill over to many Advani loyalists — sidelined by the Kushabhau Thakre regime — who are likely to be resurrected within the party.

Vajpayee, on his part, has shown to be his own master in a skilful manner and has caught the RSS off guard. Sources within the organisation accept that the Prime Minister has used the challenges

weeks been highlighting only laudatory comments.

This has forced even the likes of Datatopant Thengadi, K.S. Sudarshan and Sarvapalli Gurumurthy from being more circumspect in their criticism of the government. In recent weeks they have not gone for the government's jugular even on contentious economic issues like the IRA Bill, Patents Bills and the ambivalence over raising fundamental questions in the WTO.

It is clear that even the RSS speaks in



L.K. Advani: making up with Vajpayee

of running a coalition government as a successful argument while countering radical sections of the RSS. They confess that the Prime Minister presented the RSS with a fait accompli; either accept the government for what it is or be ready for its departure.

The RSS leadership has slowly veered around to the viewpoint that Vajpayee's compulsions need to be considered sympathetically. It has not been an easy shift in the policy of the RSS especially as some veterans held views to the contrary.

The shift began early this year after RSS general secretary H.V. Seshadri, who had taken a back seat in the first few months of the BJP's rise to power, started taking keener interest in programmes of the organisation. From a time when *Organiser* and *Panchjanya* regularly published statements of senior RSS leaders critical of the government, the periodicals have for the past several



Rajju Bhैया: down with a spinal injury

different voices depending on what the situation warrants. Like all organisations, there are wheels within wheels even here and personal loyalties play a significant role. The policy of the RSS on any particular issue thus depends greatly on which senior leader is taking the lead on the issue. Since Seshadri's ties are considered warmer with Vajpayee than with several other ageing leaders, the coming months should see greater bonhomie between the two.

With *sarsanghachalak* Rajju Bhैया indisposed with spinal injury, Seshadri's is likely to be the final word in the coming weeks. It is clear that with the threat to the survival of the government at stake, the RSS leadership has finally concluded that a bird in hand is better than two in the bush.

But, how long this bonhomie will last remains to be seen. Especially if the period is to be spent outside office. •

Nilanjana Mukhopadhyay/New Delhi

S FOR SUCCESS

Subramanian Swamy is the unscrupulous adventurer in Indian politics

Poor Dr Subramanian Swamy. Such a genius! And no one recognises it. How many Indian politicians have a degree from Harvard University? How many speak Chinese fluently? How many have a minuscule political party but so much influence that they can bring down governments and install Prime Ministers?

These are the traits that the Indian people so admire in Dr Subramanian Swamy. His buccaneering spirit. His refusal to take no for an answer. His determination and dedication to the service of the people of India, even if he has to compromise himself in the process.

First heard of in India during the Emergency of 1975-76, Dr Swamy left a prestigious teaching job at Harvard University to come to India and become a Rajya Sabha MP from the Jana Sangh. Much was made of this brilliant young man who spoke so well and was apparently totally dedicated to saving democracy.

So much so that when the Emergency was declared in 1975, Swamy pushed off underground, appearing one day in the Rajya Sabha much to the consternation of the marshals (the police were looking for Swamy to arrest him. Most of the other Opposition leaders were already behind bars). Swamy walked into the House, signed the register, raised some procedural and other objections and vanished. His appearance that day and subsequent disappearance, was the talk of the town.

Quite when Swamy became disillusioned with the Jana Sangh, criticised the 'lax and loose morals' of several leaders (including Atal Behari Vajpayee), no one knows. But he parted ways with the Jana Sangh and took up with the Janata Party under Chandra Shekhar, rapidly becoming his eyes and ears.

Chandra Shekhar, never under any illusions about anyone, told his party that Swamy must be kept occupied that his mind was so fertile that if you kept it idle it would turn destructive. But too much water had flown under the bridge. Swamy had criticised bitterly, Ramakrishna Hegde, at the time one of the most powerful leaders in the Janata Party by virtue of the fact that he was the chief minister of Karnataka. Hegde hated him and so did many Hegde groupies.

Swamy has the formula for success in Indian politics. He will not take no for an answer. He will not rest until he's got what he wants. And he practises what he preaches: genuine non-alignment

Swamy had to opt out of Janata Party politics. This suited him just fine. He had already taken up with Rajiv Gandhi, whose fascination with China equalled Swamy's expertise of that country. The two had a curious relationship: it appeared to be based on mutual need.

Meanwhile, Charan Singh's son Ajit Singh had developed a great fascination for Swamy, who understood his need to communicate with someone who knew the US lexicon as well as the western UP one. When V.P. Singh came on the scene in 1988, Chandra Shekhar advised him to give Swamy some useful work. Singh didn't listen suspecting some deep devious design on Shekhar's part. That was the end of that relationship.

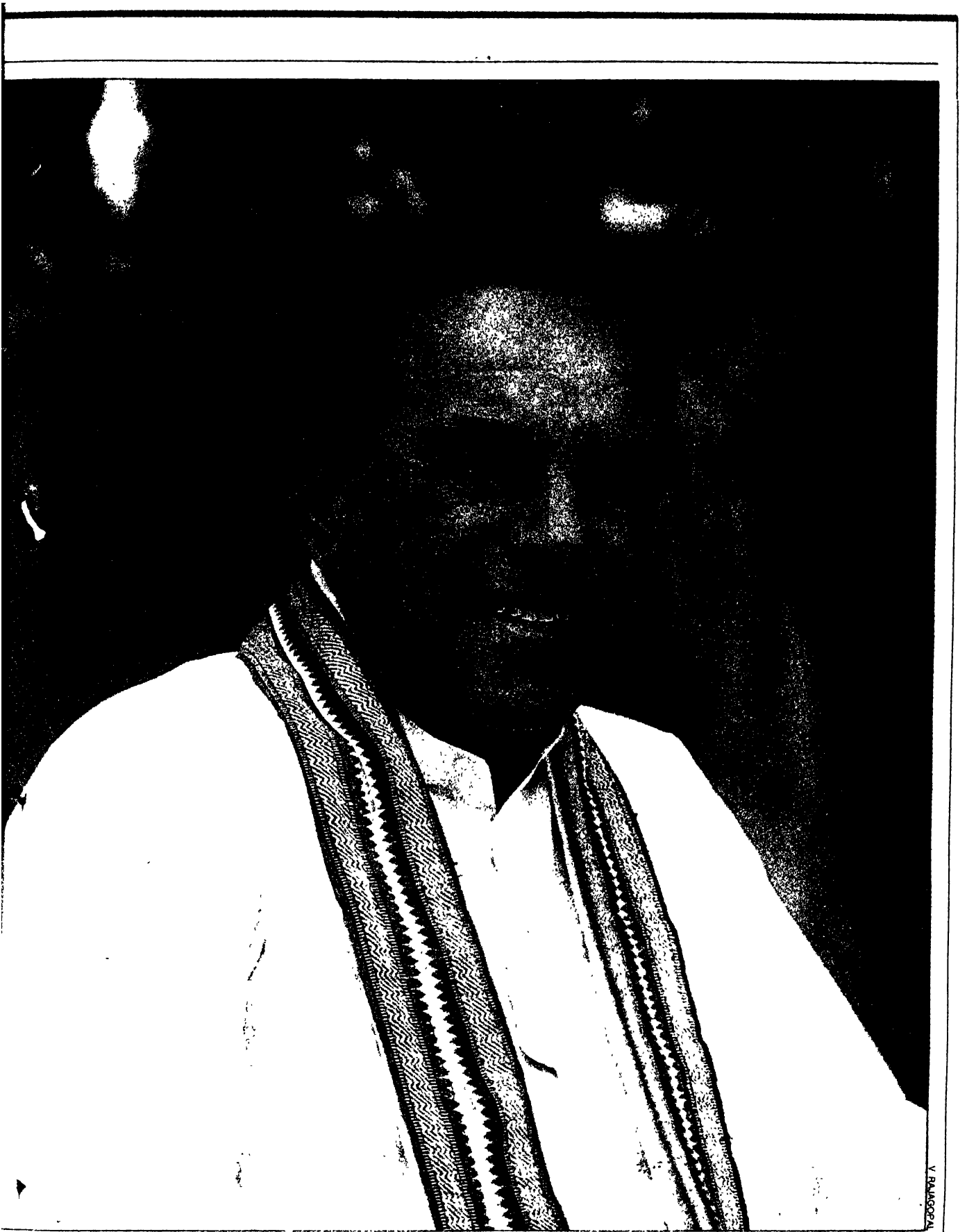
Because he knew all the actors involved, Swamy acted as the go-between when Chandra Shekhar and Rajiv Gandhi did a deal. Swamy expected he would be made finance minister by Shekhar. When Yashwant Sinha was named for that post, Swamy turned on Sinha, but he'd already been piped at the post.

Then came P.V. Narasimha Rao's regime. Now Swamy had the rank of a minister at large, though nobody is quite sure exactly what he did in the government. The only thing people knew was that he was in some way responsible for the majority Narasimha Rao reached somewhere in the middle of his tenure when Ajit Singh crossed over to support and later join the government.

At some point during these moves, Swamy also developed a great affection for Tamil Nadu. He fought a couple of elections and decided that he had a future in Tamil Nadu politics but only if Jayalalitha wasn't around. He did his best to lay booby traps for her during her chief ministership, including creating a constitutional situation where her prosecution was on the verge of being sanctioned by the Governor.

And then — surprise! surprise! — Swamy and Jayalalitha became the best of friends. As they are today.

So you see Dr Swamy has the formula for success in Indian politics. He will not take no for an answer. He will not rest until he's got what he wants. And he practises what he preaches: genuine non-alignment. •



V. RAMASOPI

MOVING AHEAD

The man behind Infosys, one of the fastest-growing IT companies in India

It was 1974 -- the height of Communist movement in east Europe. A 28-year-old man -- with a passion to see and understand the world better (the world that he thought he was part of) -- boarded a train to Nis -- a small town between the then Yugoslavia and Bulgaria.

It was Sunday morning and for a single man in an alien land there was nothing better to do.

However, his happy world was soon to crumble.

A few hours after he had boarded the train the police pulled him out of the compartment and dragged him all the way to the nearest police station. He was hurled into a dingy cell with a tiny window at a height of ten feet. He sat locked up for 72 hours -- without food and water. The crime was chatting up a local girl in French, which led to suspicion. A co-passenger, who should have known better, had complained to the police that this man was giving away state secrets. No amount of explaining helped.

So he languished in jail, scarcely knowing that every bit of humiliation was to pay off in the end.

N.R. Narayana Murthy, chairman and chief executive officer of Infosys, a company worth more than US\$ 100 million today, talks about his little love affair with the Left with just a hint of regret. "I was young and at that age you are an idealist," explains Murthy. "I thought Communism was the answer to everything. However, when I was released from jail I was told that I had been let off because I came from a friendly country," laughs Murthy. "I thought to myself -- who needs enemies with friends like these." It was then that he decided that he had *no need* for a system like that. Disillusionment grew when Murthy realis-



Murthy with his Infosys colleagues: he heads the first Indian company to have entered a US stock exchange

ed that Communism was glorifying poverty. And that the answer to the problem of a country like India was in the creation and distribution of wealth, not poverty.

Communism's loss was to be India's gain. Rejection of decadent Leftist ideology and the over-riding desire to create wealth led to discovering newer pastures.

And that was in the past. And Murthy does not believe in

looking back. At 5 feet 4 inches, he's now a tall man in the field of information technology -- a man respected for his vision and for creating a company which is a force to reckon with.

Last month, in another major coup, Infosys became the first company to be listed on the National Association of Securities Dealers Quotation (NASDAQ) -- one of the fastest-growing US stock exchanges. This is the first ever Indian company to have entered a US

WITH MURTHY



stock exchange. Infosys Technologies Limited (ITL) is now a big name in the business of software. "We realised that if we have to grow further, we will have to enhance the credibility of the company and increase the comfort level of our customers. Being multi-cultural was also necessary," says Murthy. "Besides, we had to create stock option plans in hard currency to attract talent outside India. That's how we started the whole exercise and it's been a long journey," he adds.

The journey may have been long but as far as Murthy is concerned this is just

the beginning of what started as a joint venture of seven friends with the combined capital of Rs 10,000 in 1981. Murthy had ended up borrowing money from his wife who was then working for TELCO. Today Murthy's individual share in the company would run into a couple of hundred crores. The irony is that not only is Infosys a zero-debt company but Murthy also claims to be debt-averse.

However, for the CEO of Infosys that is not the issue. As of now, to see his company on the global map is what is important. "We want to be a globally-respected software corporation and also add value to the society wherever we operate by taking up charitable activities," says the Infosys chief. "We've been in business just for 18 years and we have to carry on for many many years to come to establish ourselves globally," he adds.

An electrical engineering graduate from the University of Mysore, Murthy went to the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT, Kanpur) to do a master's degree in Computer Science. After a short stint with the Indian Institute of Management at Ahmedabad as chief systems programmer, Murthy left for Paris to work for two years.

Murthy was a restless soul during his three years in France, looking for something beyond the mundane tasks that work involved. He set off on an 11-month trip. "I donated all my money to a charitable organisation and with just US\$ 500 I visited about 25 countries and returned to India," says Murthy. His generally composed face lights up when he recalls the days of sleeping on platforms and moving around in buses all night.

It was probably the same spirit that helped him take the plunge along with his friends when he set up Infosys.

But one thing the Murthy family has consciously avoided — to let success go to their heads.

Murthy lives in a three-bedroom house in Jayanagar — Bangalore's decidedly middle-class colony. He sounds somewhat apologetic while discussing his role in the Infosys success story. The

fact that Infosys is completely identified with Murthy, he claims, is because his colleagues have been generous and let him hog the limelight since he was the 'single point contact' with the outside world.

His professional success has been complemented by a happy and contented family life. Wife Sudha has been a wonderful partner, both in personal life



"We want to be a globally-respected software corporation and also add value to society by taking up charitable activities"

and professionally as well (*see box*). Murthy's only regret is his inability to spend enough time with his family, which includes his two teenaged children. He tries to catch up on lost time but "it never works that way".

Murthy was the sixth child in a family of eight brothers and sisters. His father was an education officer from whom he acquired a taste for Western classical music and literature. His personal collection includes more than 2000 CDs and about 20,000 books. "From my mother, who had otherwise studied only till the VIIth standard, I understood the import-

CHIPPING IN

The Infosys Foundation is doing its bit towards social work

The Infosys chief and founder member doesn't stop talking about his wife Sudha Murthy. "She's a better engineer than me," says Narayana Murthy with great pride. That's not hard to believe, going by her credentials. A consistent topper throughout her academic career at the BNB College of Engineering, Hubli, she went on to add an ME with distinction from Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore in 1974.

When in 1981 the entrepreneur in Narayana Murthy decided to set up Infosys Technologies Limited, he turned his pockets inside out and finally borrowed from his wife who was then working with TELCO at Pune. In that sense, she had a role to play in Infosys' success story. But the human side of the technocrat-turned-educationist took precedence.

Founded in 1997 with 1.2 per cent of the company's profits forming the corpus fund, the Infosys Foundation is reaching out to a lot of people who need them. They are working towards better lives for aged people and destitutes. Rural upliftment, promoting talent among the economically underprivileged, encouraging cultural activities and budding artists and providing medical facilities in rural and urban sectors are some of their major thrust areas. Sudha Murthy, along with G.R. Nayak and N.S. Raghavan — all drawn from the corporate echelons of ITL — are the trustees of Infosys Foundation which recently set up the 1001st library under the Shaalege Onddu Granthalaya (a library for every school) scheme. "During the course of our interactions with the children of rural Karnataka, we realised their keen interest in reading and their inability to afford it. That is when we decided to set up one library each in every school," said Mrs Murthy. According to her, about 20 lakh books have been distributed under this scheme.

The foundation has also set up a breast cancer ward for women at the Kanchipuram Cancer Hospital, Tamil Nadu. The ward, which cost Rs 15 lakh, has 50 beds. Not limited to Karnataka, the foundation extends its activities to other regions of the country like Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Orissa and Delhi.

Be it raking in profits for Infosys or addressing themselves to the needs of the underprivileged, the 'Infoscons' — the way Infosys employees like to describe themselves — are doing their bit. Says Murthy, "We plan to increase the funding for the foundation up to 5 per cent of our profit after tax or more." And that would mean a windfall for the foundation, going by the optimism of Narayana Murthy who foresees his company worth a billion dollar soon.

ance of virtues like sacrifice and sharing," he says.

Coming from a family like that, Murthy feels his middle-class values have stood him in good stead. Though his critics say that his aversion to debts and risks have slowed down the growth of the company. But Infosys auditors feel otherwise. There is yet to be a more transparent company, they claim. And nothing could describe it better than the Infosys motto — 'Powered by intellect. Driven by values'.

Murthy is retiring in another seven years. Nadan Nilckani, the managing director of the company is second in line, for whom Murthy has high regard. "As a matter of fact, if I were ever to start a business I would only hope that it's the same team," says he.

Besides, Murthy also hopes that the



Murthy with wife Sudha: she looks after the Infosys Foundation

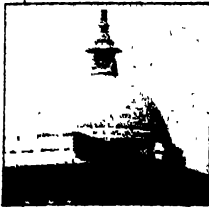
younger generation that goes abroad to study will return to work in their own country. He narrates a little story for those who complain about the dismal state of affairs in India. This is a Polish anecdote about a man who goes to New York because he is told that the roads there are paved with gold. However, he returns home saying that not only were the roads not paved with gold but there were no roads and that he had to pave them.

Murthy is one such person who treads on a road which he paved himself. •

Anuja Joshi/Bangalore

Unholy mess

Political uncertainty involves high foreign policy costs



During a three-week stay at Washington in February, I was struck by an underplayed but unmistakable concern in the state department that the BJP-led ruling coalition might collapse before the Indo-US dialogue could be clinched, complicating further the task of finding a nuclear meeting ground between the two estranged democracies.

The danger has now become real, thanks to the gnawing uncertainty gripping New Delhi at the time of writing. Political and economic consequences of this sorry state of affairs are already manifest. The crash of the stock exchange by 167 points in a single day has been followed, along with a mild recovery of the stock market, by a disturbing decline in the exchange value of the rupee.

But that is not strictly within the purview of this column. Its concern is the very high foreign policy costs of this unholy mess. Inevitable these costs may be, but it is nothing short of a scandal that any worry on this score is conspicuous by its sheer absence.

The South Block was entirely right in opposing NATO's outrageous adventure in Yugoslavia even though it did cause some strains in the diplomatic intercourse with America. But the critics of the NATO air strikes on a sovereign country were isolated in the Security Council where all the non-aligned countries happily lined up with the US, making a mockery of the Indian plans to mobilise the moribund NAM over the painful issue.

A weak and uncertain India, ruled by quick changing governments reminiscent of the Fourth Republic in France, will not be taken seriously by anyone. When I mentioned this to a veteran Indian diplomat, he laughed and retorted: "My dear friend, this has already happened."

He may be right. After all, the US and others focused on this country so intensely only because of our decision to display our nuclear prowess. Since then, however, our inability to get our act together and our buckling under pressure to refrain from testing the enhanced Agni has made us a laughing stock.

The bus diplomacy with Pakistan had not only opened a new vista in a crucial relationship but also won Atal Behari Vajpayee plaudits. Even if his government can somehow scrape through, the Pakistanis are bound to think twice before imparting any momentum to the talks scheduled for next month.

It is the vital relationship with China that has become the worst victim of the BJP's utter maladroitness, to put it no more strongly than that. The Chinese are not alone in thinking, and saying, that last year's Shakti tests had to do more with the BJP's political agenda than with India's grand strategy.

Long before this happened, George Fernandes — who has played havoc with the morale of the armed forces by sacking the naval chief and making things worse by his disingenuous



Air strikes in Yugoslavia: show of arrogance

The South Block was entirely right in opposing NATO's outrageous adventure in Yugoslavia. But a weak and uncertain India will not be taken seriously by anyone

defence of an indefensible deed — was allowed to describe China as this country's enemy number one. That the Prime Minister's principal secretary, Brajesh Mishra, later repudiated this notion only underscores the original folly.

The most shocking part of the story is that the tottering BJP government, resentful of the visit to Beijing of a Congress delegation led by Natwar Singh, sought to discredit such well-established political exchanges under which several BJP delegations have also gone to China in the past.

The vilification campaign, accompanied by hints of missile deployments by Beijing against India, began with two unsigned sheets of paper distributed to journalists at the end of the defence minister's anti-Bhagwat press conference.

What is China to make of such destructive and palpably partisan tactics at the precise moment when the strained India-China relations were about to be on the mend? •

Hey, kya bol



ti tu...

AAMIR KHAN, ON

- How he became an actor
- What he likes in people
- Being a *tapori*
- Why Khandala is the most important place on earth for him



He doesn't have a cellphone. He's impossibly demanding (film offers are considered only after he's made sure who the director is going to be and what the screenplay is like). It is important for him to know, really know the filmmaker before deciding to act in a film.

Aamir Khan is a perfectionist — and a pain for most people.

But you have to agree that this infuriating trait has paid off. Almost every film he's acted in in the 90s has been a blockbuster: Dharmesh Darshan's *Raja Hindustani*, Ram Gopal Verma's *Rangeela*, Indra

Kumar's *Ishq* and Vikram Bhatt's *Ghulam*.

And never mind if there are those, like Mahesh Bhatt, who think the pursuit of perfectionism in a flawed world is a sign of megalomania. Aamir laughs them off.

Part of the problem is a conscious decision Aamir took six years ago: not to talk to film magazines. This has resulted in reckless gossip about him. The fact is, he is inaccessible to most people. Few people really know this young, reclusive filmstar.

Subhash K. Jha is one of the few journalists Khan does talk to. In this interview, you get glimpses of the real Aamir Khan.

Q: You turned 34 in March this year. Are you happy with your life and career?

A: Yes, I think I'm quite happy with the way my career has shaped up. I'm also happy with the number of films I've done so far and the quality of the films. I'm happy about the way people have reacted to my work and the success I've achieved. Finally, I'm happy that I've had the chance to improve with every film.

Q: Gosh, you sound like one happy man! Have you always been this happy? Did you have a very south Bombay kind of upbringing?

A: No. In fact, we never lived in south Bombay. You could say that I come from a middle class, conservative family background. We're four brothers and sisters. It was a regular kind of childhood.

Q: Your father, Tahir Hussain, had to go through some trying times as producer. What do you remember about those times?

A: My father's problems as producer started with a film he made called *Locket*.

Q: Apparently, Rekha gave your father a really hard time during the making of *Locket*.



(Clockwise) **TWINKLE KHANNA**, Neelam, **REKHA**, Javed Akhtar, **KETAN MEHTA**, Karisma

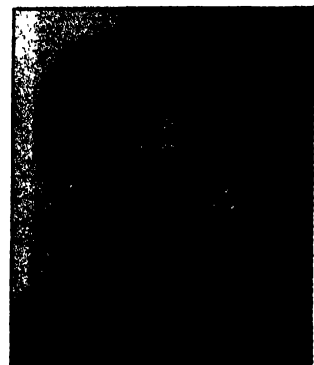
"People think I shaved my head for the role in *Holi*. But no, actually I shaved my head because my girlfriend ditched me. It was part protest, part rejection, part dejection"



A: It wasn't just Rekha. The stars in *Locket* weren't really very professional. That did affect my attitude to the profession. Those were hard times for us. My father was weighed down by debts. But he's a very strong man. Eventually, *Locket* was released and it actually made some money!

Q: What did that experience teach you?

A: First, I discovered what happens in a well-settled family when there is a financial crunch. My father's strength taught me how to be strong. Although at that point I was too young to have decided on a career—I was 13 or 14—I did decide I would always be professional in all my dealings in life.





Kapoor, MADHURI DIXIT



Q: When did you decide you wanted to be an actor? By then you'd already done two films.

A: You mean the two films I did as a child artiste (*Yaadon Ki Baraat* and *Madhosh*)? Those didn't count. My uncle, Nasir Husain, told me I had to play my cousin Tariq as a child. So I didn't give it much thought.

Actually, I decided to be an actor when I was in my first year of college...maybe even earlier.

I did a short film called *Paranoia* with Aditya Bhattacharya (Basu Bhattacharya's son). I did *Paranoia* for a lark. But during its making, I got interested in both acting and the process of filmmaking. My parents didn't know I was acting in *Paranoia*. If I had asked them they would have demurred. They were against a career in films.

Q: Was that because of the financial hardships your father faced as a producer?

A: It wasn't as if my parents objected to the film industry on moral grounds. They just didn't want me to face the uncertainties of showbiz.

But after I did *Paranoia*, I decided this is what I wanted to do with my life. I did two diploma films at the Pune Film Institute. As an actor, these two films were a learning experience for me.

I distinctly remember the first screening of *Paranoia* at the Dimple Theatre in Bombay. There were just five people in the audience: Aditya, me, my sister Nikhat, Aditya's mother and Shabana Azmi.

When the film ended, Shabanaji got up and told Aditya: "I don't understand the film. But who's the actor? He's really good." Aditya pointed to me and said: "There, that's him." I was on cloud nine. Someone introduced me to Shabanaji as Tahir Hussain's son. I requested her not to tell my parents I'd done *Paranoia* because I hadn't told them about it. She was aghast.

Eventually, my parents did come to know I'd acted in a film, and after seeing *Paranoia*, they were convinced I was totally unsuited to a career in acting. (Laughs)

When I decided to quit college and become an assistant director, there was a big hoo-ha in the family. My parents insisted I finish college. My friends and cousins were aghast. But I saw college as a waste of time. So I quit and joined my uncle Nasir Husain as an assistant. Within three months, my family decided I'd taken the right decision.

Q: Was that when Nasirsaab decided to launch you as a hero in *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* (QSQT)?

A: No, before that came Ketan Mehta's film *Holi*.

Q: And you shaved your head to play the role in *Holi*?

A: People think so. But no, actually I shaved my head

because my girlfriend ditched me. It was part protest, part rejection, part dejection. (Laughs)

So when Ketan called me over, the first thing he asked me was: "What happened to your hair?" I'd heard he was using a Stadicam camera and I was very keen to see how it worked. I didn't know what role I would be playing. But I went along just to be part of the film and see how Ketan worked. Maybe, people remember me in *Holi* because of my shaved head.

Q: At what point did your uncle (Nasir Husain) decide to launch you in *QSQT*?

A: After I assisted him in two films, *Manzil Manzil* and *Zabardast*.

An incident that happened could have prompted my uncle's decision. I happened to be in Khandala (laughs).

fact, that's what I was planning to do when *QSQT* happened.

You could say I had a dream launch. In the first week of the publicity campaign the banners declared: "Who's Aamir Khan?" After one week, another line was added: "Ask the Girl Next Door." The following week they added: "See him in *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak*."

Q: When *QSQT* was released you were already married. Was your family's opposition to your marriage as fierce as their opposition to your choice of career?

A: There was no opposition to the marriage from my family, since they didn't know I was getting married. They were given no opportunity to oppose it!

But Reena's family was against the marriage. They didn't know me. I can understand how they must have felt, she being a Hindu and me a Muslim. Moreover, I was just

(Clockwise) **POOJA BHATT**, Sonali Bendre, **URMILA MATONDKAR**, Shabana Azmi, **JUHI**

"There was no opposition to the marriage from my family, since they didn't know I was getting married. They were given no opportunity to oppose it! We had a runaway marriage, with two garlands, a box of *mithai* and three witnesses"



Javedsaab (Javed Akhtar) was also in Khandala. He came to meet Nasirsaab. When he saw me he wanted to know who I was. When my uncle said I was assisting him, Javedsaab told him I was wasting my time; that I should be an actor instead.

I was eavesdropping on the conversation and enjoying every bit of it! An acting career for me had never been discussed at home. I was quietly confident about being able to do this, but I didn't try to convince anyone.

Then, after his encounter with Javedsaab, my uncle introduced me to someone as the hero of his next film. I was zapped. I hadn't been told anything about this. I didn't take him seriously. I thought he just making polite conversation. I was clear I wanted to put no pressure on my father or my uncle to make a film for me.

Q: If Nasir Husain hadn't decided to make *QSQT*, what would you have done?

A: I would have picked up the cans of my two diploma films, *Paranoia* and *Holi*, and shown them to producers. In





HAWLA



an assistant director, struggling to become an actor. It couldn't get any worse. (Laughs)

But we wanted to rule our lives ourselves. We had a runaway marriage, with two garlands, a box of *mithai* and three witnesses: my friend Satyajit Patkar, his wife Swati and their cousin, Anand.

Q: Why did you decide to keep your marriage a secret until the release of *QSQT*?

A: Just before the film was released, a film journalist asked me if I was married. I said no. Within the *QSQT* unit, my marriage was a well-known fact. I made no attempt to hide it. In fact, Reena is there in the song *Papa kehte hain*. She's the girl in the red dress with long hair whom I sing a line to.

But my uncle Nasir Husain told me not to say I'm married if I'm questioned about it. I tried to argue. But he said there were a whole lot of people, whose careers were at stake in *QSQT*, besides me.

Q: Your wife has chosen to keep away from the limelight.

Is that a decision you've taken together?

A: No, it is entirely her decision. She feels she isn't part of the film industry, so there is no need for her to give interviews. If she does, it would be about the work she has done. At the moment, she is a housewife looking after our two children, Junaid and Ira.

Just a month ago, I launched my own production and she's going to help me with it.

Q: You're producing a film? What is it about?

A: It's called *Lagaan* (tax). I'm playing the lead. It will be written and directed by my friend Ashutosh Gowariker (who earlier directed me in *Baazi*). A.R. Rahman will do the music. Nitin Desai will do the artwork and Bhanu Athaiya the costumes.

Q: What's stopping you from taking to direction?

A: I only want to do one thing at a time. At this point in my career, I'm too engrossed in acting to go into direction.

Q: Why aren't you taking more risks with your career?

A: (Laughs) Are you serious? Do you know I'm the one actor who has taken maximum risks with my career? For one, I'm doing the least number of assignments, and therefore not blocking any films. I'm working with directors I have faith in. They needn't necessarily be at the top. When I did *Rangeela* with Ram Gopal Verma, he'd had, I think, four flops before that. When I did *Raja Hindustani* with Dharmesh Darshan, he had a semi-successful *Lootere* behind him. This isn't to say Dharmesh wasn't a good director then.

What I'm trying to say is, I've had offers from big-time filmmakers. But each time, I've decided to go by my instinct and do films with people I have faith in. Isn't that being adventurous?

And then, I'm the one actor who doesn't speak to the film press. So I've zero support in that area. I'm not playing the media game as it is played these days. So now are you convinced I take risks?

Q: You didn't enjoy working with Karisma Kapoor in *Raja Hindustani*. You went on record to say she wasn't committed to the film.

A: I don't want to go into that. I did say that. But to keep harping on it would be petty. There are a lot of girls I've enjoyed working with...

Q: What about Pooja Bhatt?

A: Let me tell you about the girls I've enjoyed working with. Sonali Bendre in *Sarfaroosh*, Rani Mukherjee in *Ghulam*. With Juhi too I've had no problems professionally. I've enjoyed working with Madhurn Dixit, Neelam and Urmila. Twinkle, with whom I've done *Mela*, is a friend.

Q: What about Pooja Bhatt? You haven't mentioned her. Is it because you had once been linked with her in the gossip columns of film magazines?

A: No, no (laughs). I assure you, I just forgot to mention her. Pooja is also good to work with. Extremely professional. •

Interviewed by Subhash K. Jha

Friends of Music

They were just four to start with. Now Delhi's song-loving fraternity is swaying to their beat

In 1995, four friends met. It was a picnic — food and drink were in unlimited supply. And so was music which went on till the wee hours of the morning. The foursome — Mohit Chauhan, Kanika Satyanand, Valentine Shipley and Sanjoy Roy — discovered that they shared a passion for music, that they were all Friends of Music. The name stuck. What had begun as fun materialised into a forum for music lovers who met on a monthly basis at an informal venue.

Vocalist Mohit Chauhan, who has hit the big league with the success of his group Silk Route recalls the early days when listening to music was sheer leisure. That was a time when the world of music was not guided by the money factor. "We got pizzas from home, sat on the grass and listened to music. This would carry on till late in the night. The atmosphere was great and you got to listen to some great music."

Chauhan has moved on, rarely finding time nowadays to attend a Friends of Music (FOM) get-together. But then so has FOM. Probably Chauhan would be a bit surprised to see the kind of crowd thronging its monthly sessions, these days.

Today, FOM is a full-fledged club where candidates are screened before they can become members. It's no longer just an informal place where music lovers can pile on.

Predictably, not all of the old-timers, some of who still hang around, are happy. They miss the casual ambience. Their contention being that FOM sessions have, over the years, missed out on what they had started to promote — just music, that is. "Instead, we have a crowd who come in because they consider it to be a social do where you must be seen."

Agrees Chauhan. "In one of the sessions I attended recently, I found the



VALENTINE SHIPLEY

CANZONA



USHA UTHUP

VIVienne POCHA



public chatting and laughing while a poor guy played in one corner. Hardly an atmosphere for good music."

Frequent visitors agree. Of late, the FOM functions have become a trifle unruly. The crowds are huge and often unwieldy and one finds the organisers watching helplessly as they do their own numbers. Some get-togethers which boast of performances by popular bands like Euphoria, Parikrama and Indian Ocean are packed. The crowds sway with the music, drinking their blues away. Though this speaks volumes for the success of the FOM, it also serves as a tragic reminder of the commercialisation of a novel, informal and meant-for-all concept.

And then there is the question of membership fees which many feel is too high. But then, to be fair to the organisers, this is perhaps the only way they can check the entry of hoodlums and cover the costs. For an individual, the one time entry fee is Rs 1250 while for a couple it is Rs 2200. For over 20 concerts per year, apart from special music sessions, it is not too bad a bargain. Besides, one gets to listen to some great music all through the night over weekends.

Sushmit Sen of Indian Ocean agrees whole-heartedly. "To some the fee may seem high, but then this is required. Otherwise anyone and everyone will walk in — very often people who have only nuisance value. Also, when you grow as FOM has since its inception, a certain amount of commercialisation is inevitable. What is more important, you get to listen to some great and original music."

True. Where else does one get to listen to Sixties rock numbers with the unique flavour of violin, tabla and other percussion instruments? Or African beats and Caribbean rhythms from the Kenyan band, Roots Inity? And then there are several others who first performed at the FOM and are now being approached by music companies.

The list is long, reason enough for the FOM to feel proud. Some of these are — Indian Ocean with its blend of Western and Oriental music; The Capital Swingers, a jazz band and brainchild of pianist Mosin Menezes; experimental rocks and blues band Canzona. The choice is varied, ranging from classical vocalist Faiyaz Wasifuddin Dagar to rock and roll Usha Uthup and anything in between.

And then there are occasional wonders. Recalls Sanjoy Roy of Teamwork Films and also one of the workforce at FOM, "Once one of our members came with a proposal — her driver's son, she claimed, was a good singer. We agreed and here was this band of teenagers belting out Hindi numbers. Though they were no greatshakes as singers, what was important was that they had been given a chance to perform, something which I

then FOM has been lucky. Friends have chipped in. "Our earlier performances were held in Vipin Handa's farmhouse. Pepsi sponsors our shows and they have been very considerate and not demanding. They do occasionally feel that our shows must be publicised but I do not think that this is such a good idea. After all, FOM concerts are family get-togethers and we do not want a mob barging in," says Roy.



SANJOY ROY

"Pepsi, [our sponsors], occasionally feel that our shows must be publicised. But FOM concerts are family get-togethers and we do not want a mob barging in"

think only FOM would do unhesitatingly."

And Roy concedes that they are not very choosy when giving a stage to first-time artistes. "All we ask for is a demo cassette, if they have any, or if one of us could walk in and watch them perform at their rehearsals. They are almost always given a chance to perform. The only thing which we streamline is the time to be allowed. If they have a holding power, we give them over an hour, otherwise if we get the impression that they cannot sustain audience attention, they get only 15-30 minutes."

Matters are slightly more problematic when it comes to covering costs. But

Agrees Lokesh Madan of Canzona, another FOM protege. "What is great about FOM concerts is that you are allowed to do your own thing. Unlike other concerts where you have to bow to audience demands and are usually compelled to play their requests, in FOM performances we just let ourselves go."

Which can be highly reassuring to a group of nervous debutants, and extremely relaxing for strained regular performers. Come what may, FOM will stand by them.

Isn't that what friends of music was supposed to mean in the first place? •

Pallavi Ghosh/New Delhi

LUCKY GUY

At least one guy will be thankful to our Prime Minister. Delhi stage director Aamir Raza Hussain, whose *Legend Of Ram* broke theatrical



paradigms of time and space with its concept of a moving audience platform, now travels to Pakistan with his Stagedoor productions, thanks to the new-found friendship between the two countries. Hussain was in the news recently during the Satyameva Jayate celebration in the capital held to mark one year of BJP rule.



LET'S EXCHANGE IDEAS

Plato and Aristotle started it; but it was the Bengali who claimed the copyright to *adda*. Think of what it spawned: ideas, movements, even revolutions — over endless cups of tea and a thousand burnt-out cigarettes.

That last item though will be missed by *adda*-lovers in Calcutta who can now get together every Sunday at the CIMA Gallery for a chit-chat session, or more optimistically, a confluence of minds. If the 4 April launch was any hint, innovations

shouldn't be a problem: who could've thought the deep timbre of an exotic instrument like the Didjeridoo, played by German musician Uwe Neumann, would gel so well with Victor Banerjee's reading of Jorge Luis Borges' short stories?

MIGHTIEST IS THE PEN

After panning journalists for having a 'nose only for gossip, gossip and more gossip', celebs have now shaped their own defence: they have taken up the pen. Profiling three of them:



MADHU SAPRE

Supermodel with a sartorial fondness for pythons. Several newspapers are already carrying her columns



MEGHNA REDDY

Model, veejay and actress. Latest profession: columnist. She's also going abroad for a course in media



ANUPAM KHER

Character artiste; now would-be author. Wonder what he has to say about his famous assault on a journo

CAVEAT: (Knowing how quirky celebs can be) writing star to shooting star is less than half-a-step

SHE'S A TOUGH OLD GIRL

Heights, obviously, are no problem for her. Santosh Yadav, the only woman to have scaled Mt. Everest twice, plans to have her millennium bash by being also the first woman to take the toughest route up — the Kangshung Face



approach from the Chinese side. Only four others have scaled the peak by this route. The ten-member expedition, flagged off on 19 March, culminates sometime between 12-24 May after an arduous trek from Khartha, China, to the Base Camp. Yadav, who comes from Rewari in Haryana, leads the team. Postscript: Back home on terra firma, others too are planning *their* millennium bash: a baby on 1.1. 2000. Prospective parents are even prepared to bring forward or postpone dates!

FOR FANS ABROAD



Mittal: taking Bollywood to the West



Bad news for Zee: a steel magnate is planning to trespass on their cinematic domain. If things go according to schedule, the 'trespasser', Ispat boss L.N. Mittal, will be soon diversifying into entertainment business with his digital channel B4U — or Bollywood For You. The unlikely foray can spark off a war over viewership where the main sufferer could be Zee. Mittal reckons there's big money in selling Bollywood to expats, so B4U, which is going to be a pay channel, will show the latest Bombay hits to overseas fans. Now what could have given him this brilliant, money-spinning idea?

AISHWARYA RAI



SALMAN KHAN

Has Aishwarya Rai managed to make Salman Khan do what no other woman has managed so far? Propose marriage, what else.

The story doing the rounds in tinsel town is that Salman has fallen head over heels in love with the exquisite Ms Rai (and who can blame him for that?) and is set on marrying her. He has even approached Aishwarya's parents to ask for her hand in marriage. But while Ash is quite fond of him, she's not sure that she wants to settle down just yet; and that too, with Salman who has made infidelity into a fine art.

But where does that leave Somy Ali, who loved Salman so patiently over so many years? Back home in America, where she sought refuge after Khan failed to make an honest woman of her.

Her career may be stuck in the doldrums, but her love life is sure looking up. Neha, heroine of the ill-fated *Kareeb*, is much in love with her new boyfriend, Manoj Bajpai (of *Satya* fame). And, if rumour is to be believed, the two have moved into a love nest of their own, cocking a snook at convention.

But don't talk of marriage just yet. Neha and Manoj both have careers to work on. Only when they are well-established in moviedom will they begin to think of such mundane matters.

MANOJ BAJPAI



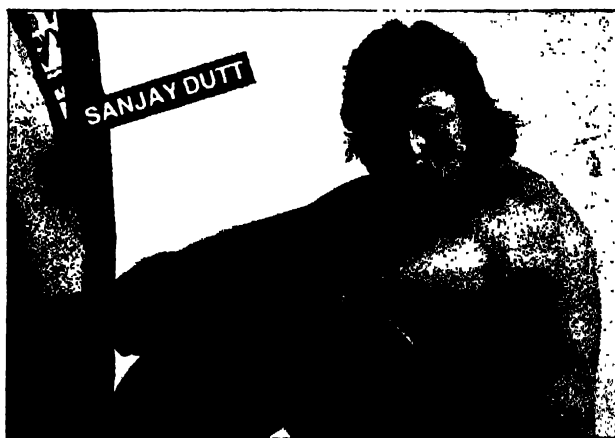
Things are finally looking up for Sanjay Dutt. *Duag*, the *Fire*, in which he had a small role, took a good initial; he has just finished a year of marital bliss with wife Rhea; and now comes news that his former in-laws, the late Richa Sharma's parents, have decided to drop the case for custody of his daughter Trishala.

Last year, when Dutt was visiting New York, he had been slapped with a restraining order, which did not allow him to contact his daughter until the custody case was decided. An aghast Dutt immediately began

legal proceedings, and thus began the battle to decide whom Trishala would live with.

But now, wiser counsel seems to have prevailed on the Sharmas. They have decided to give up on their plans to legally adopt Trishala and settle with Sanjay out of court. The compromise decided upon is that Trishala will continue to live with her grandparents in the States, but her father, Sanjay, will have unlimited access to her.

In fact, Trishala will be coming to India in a few months time to spend her summer vacations with her dad. And needless to say, both Sanjay and Rhea are looking forward to her visit.



Lost and found

Exide chief S.B. Ganguly is back. But a number of questions regarding his sudden disappearance remain unanswered



S.B. Ganguly after his return: anxious moments

He reappeared as suddenly as he had disappeared. On 2 April, Good Friday, Exide Industries chairman and managing director

Satya Brata Ganguly came out of his residence at Calcutta's posh Alipore area at 5 in the morning. The morning walk inside the Horticulture Society's garden was an old habit. The garden is a favourite spot for early morning strollers, who include some of the top industrialists of the country who stay in the neighbourhood.

The sky was not yet fully lit up. As Ganguly approached the gates, he saw, in the faint light of the early dawn, a car parked some distance away from the gates under a tree. A couple of men were attending to it and it looked as if the car had a flat tyre.

As Ganguly was walking past the vehicle, the men stood in front of him. One brandished a gun, while the other shoved him inside the car. A couple of blows landed on him. Ganguly was shouting, but there was no one. "If you don't stop shouting, we will kill you," one of them told him. He was jostled into the front seat and quickly blindfolded. The car started moving. Ganguly told one of the men to let him move on to the back seat so that he could be a little comfortable. He was terrified and he was bleeding from his mouth. The car sped away. Ganguly was not sure how long they drove — maybe six or seven, or ten hours.

Back in Calcutta, there was no one at his 5C New Road residence except for the servants. His wife had gone to Delhi. His sons stayed abroad. When Ganguly did not return by his usual time, the servants thought something was wrong. Even then, the thought of Ganguly being abducted had not crossed their mind.

So, when he did not return well past his usual time, the servants decided to check it out. They got in touch with his daughter who stays in Calcutta. And then the phones started ringing. Someo-

PRADIP SANYAL

ne went to the Horticulture Garden to enquire why Ganguly had not returned. Ganguly was a known face in the Horticulture Garden. But on that day, the guards had not seen him.

By the time an alarm was raised and the police swung into action, Ganguly's abductors had enough time to whisk him away. Inside the car, gagged and blindfolded, Ganguly had no sense of time and direction. They kept on driving, till they reached a decrepit house. Two guards approached him. He was pushed inside a modest room. The room had a mattress, a pillow and a chair. By then it was evening.

After an hour, a man came to SB and told him that someone wanted to speak to him. He was again blindfolded and taken inside another room. "What is your name and what business are you in?" he was asked. Ganguly gave his name and pointed out that he did not own any business but was employed by a company. "Then we have brought the wrong person," his interrogator told him. Ganguly was also told that they wanted a ransom of at least Rs 2 crore. They took his contact numbers — those of his daughter and his brother. He was again blindfolded and led back to his room.

By evening, the news of Ganguly's disappearance had spread. Did he go on his own, or was he taken away

by force?

Even the police was not sure whether he was just a missing person or was actually kidnapped. Some even insisted that being a devotee of Guru Ravi Shankar, he had gone in search of spiritual solace. Others were quick to point out that he was indeed kidnapped and that the extortion menace, hounding businessmen in other metropolises, had finally reached Calcutta. The weekend went by, but there was no news of SB.

By 5 April, Monday, there was no dearth of conspiracy theories. The police appeared to be following three leads. One theory was that he had gone to Kathmandu to see his guru. But that did not explain why he had to suddenly disappear.

The second theory was that Ganguly's abduction was the fallout of a vendetta between the Rahejas — owners of Exide Industries — and a Dubai-based don over a real estate deal. Ganguly was close to the Rahejas and by kidnapping him, the don was trying to make the Rahejas relent.

The third theory was that the Exide chief's vanishing act was a case of abduction for ransom organised by small-time lifters. But Calcutta Police's detective chief Narayan Ghosh had a stock reply: "No development, no news. We are looking into all the angles."

By 6 April, Tuesday, the police had more or less discarded the spiritual

angle and was concentrating on the fact that SB had indeed been "kidnapped". Raids were made at possible hideouts. The owner of a telephone booth was picked up because a call was traced to the booth. Ganguly's abductors apparently let him get in touch with his family. He scribbled a note on a piece of paper saying that he was fine and under no pressure. The note was sent by fax. He also rang up his office.

And on that optimistic note, West Bengal home (police) minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee — coordinating the search — told newsmen in the evening to "wait for a few more hours". But SB did not return. Neither could he be traced, even 24 hours after Bhattacharjee's assurance. "I told you about his return on the basis of very reliable information. I should have been more cautious," he told newsmen the next day.

Not only was Bhattacharjee forced to eat his words, he also had to bear the brunt of jeers. Clearly, the police had virtually made no headway in locating SB. Even chief minister Jyoti Basu felt that his home minister should not have shot his mouth off.

And then, the Exide chief returned on the morning of 9 April. Speaking to newsmen at his residence, Ganguly



Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee: problem of management



A heavily guarded Horticulture Society: watch your steps

described his week-long experience in captivity. But he did not say where he was taken. All he said was that it was a case of mistaken identity.

According to Ganguly, his kidnappers even apologised to him and assured him that he would soon be set free. Around 12.30 am on 9 April, they gave him some money and put him in a train, blindfolded and without a ticket. He reached Howrah Station early in the morning, got into a taxi and came home.

Not many, including the police, were convinced by his account. Ganguly could not say which train he was travelling on. Neither could he say from where he had got on to the train. The police, on their part, could not locate him despite the fax message he sent and the telephone call he made to his office. The incident also exposed how lax surveillance had become. According to Ganguly, while coming back, he travelled without ticket in an air-conditioned second class coach, got down at Howrah Station, walked from the platform to the taxi stand and nobody could locate him.

Moreover, it remained a mystery as to why Ganguly was kept for seven days even after his abductors realised that they

had kidnapped the wrong person. Detective chief Narayan Ghosh insisted that this was a case of kidnapping for ransom. Also, corporate sources confirmed that Ganguly's release was secured for a ransom — brokered in Bombay — though he denied any payment being made.

For the state administration, Ganguly's disappearance could not have come at a worse time and Bhattacharjee's snafu made things worse. Even as one industry after the other kept shifting out of West Bengal, the administration was making an all-out effort to project the state as a place where industries were free from intimidation. And SB was a

Exide chairman S.B. Ganguly's kidnapping and his subsequent release have exposed the vulnerability of Calcutta. The incident has also exposed how lax the surveillance system has become

prominent face in Calcutta's corporate world.

There was a palpable sense of fear among the city businessmen. A delegation even met the government, expressing its concern and suggesting ways so that such things do not happen in future. Some were worried that their families could also become targets if security was not made tighter.

"We are happy and relieved that he has come back unharmed. We hope to see some action on the proposals we have given to the state government," said Najib Arif, secretary-general of the Indian Chamber of Commerce. He, however, brushed aside the suggestion that the Ganguly saga will have an adverse effect on the state's industrial climate.

The police, meanwhile, is toying with the idea of setting up a task force which will provide security to early morning strollers. Armed personnel will be posted in places where people go for walks. But a section of the police feels that not only is the move inadequate, it also glosses over the basic problem. They point out that over the years, with a dwindling number of 'sources', the Calcutta Police has become out of sync with the underworld.

As a result, the police do not get advance information of impending crimes. Lack of 'source money' is not the problem, they point out. Many police officers no longer keep alive their underworld contacts. Sources in the police also point out that anything can happen without their knowledge because the department no longer has an intelligence network worth its name.

In the Ganguly saga, the police has registered a case of kidnapping. They point out that gangs operating in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar were trying to set up bases in Calcutta and Ganguly's abduction may have been their handiwork. Ghosh and his team are in touch with their counterparts in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. A number of places in Calcutta were raided on 10 April in search of a 'businessman' who the police believe had brokered the deal for SB's release. The same person had brokered a deal when businessman Sajjan Jalan was kidnapped in January when he was out for his morning walk.

SB is back at his office in Exide House. But his disappearance and subsequent resurfacing have exposed the vulnerability of Calcutta in the face of organised crime. •

Sourabh Sen/Calcutta



Former NMML director Ravinder Kumar

Head-to-head

Human resources development minister Dr Murl Manohar Joshi is in the news again and once again, for backing a politically incorrect cause. The HRD ministry casually tossed a missile in the laps of indignant dons and social sciences researchers last month by announcing that O.P. Kejriwal, CEO of Prasar Bharati, would be director of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML). This was followed by the shattering disclosure that K.R. Malkani and M.M. Shankdhar, both members of the RSS, would be the government's nominees on the governing body of the institute.

The appointments were made after months of lobbying, resignations and mud-slinging. At war were two groups of academics: Left-leaning, anti-BJP

The appointment of the new director of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library sparks off a controversy in the academic world

historians and social scientists, pitted against a set of liberal and pro-BJP scholars whose mission in life has been to "break the system of patronage knitted together by the Marxist mafia". Professor M.M. Shankdhar, former professor at Delhi University, says: "NMML had been turned into the dynastic property of

the Nehru-Gandhi family and the Marxists were using it to dispense patronage. At last, this monopoly has been broken." And how.

After Jawaharlal Nehru's death and the decision to turn his property and assets into a trust, it became a sort of convention to have the Prime Minister head the society. So Indira Gandhi headed it during her lifetime. After she died, Rajiv Gandhi took it over and continued as its head even when he was out of power.

However, when he was killed and P.V. Narasimha Rao came to power, Rao graciously relinquished hold and Sonia Gandhi became chairman of the society and trust, conclusively breaking the convention that the PM should head the society. She continues in the post. There is a 32-member society to assist



her — comprising N.D. Tiwari (vice-president), H.Y. Sharada Prasad, Mushirul Hasan, Yogendra Alagh, A.K. Damodaran, etc.

The day-to-day affairs of the society, its research and other activities were handled, for several years, by author and historian B.R. Nanda who has intensively researched Nehru. When his term came to an end, he was succeeded by Ravinder Kumar, also a well known authority on modern Indian history.

Kumar continued as director for 17 years. He was given extension after extension. Finally, when his term ended last year and it was generally believed that acting-director H.D. Sharma would be appointed director, the society decided it was time to look for someone else.

There are many who feel that this was when the problem started. One reason was that the government was the BJP's. And the other, that the HRD minister was a man who was determined to break monopolies in academics wherever they might exist.

The society formed from among itself a six-member selection committee which was to have appointed the director. The committee sent two names to the HRD ministry for selection: Mushirul

Many feel that the problem started after Ravinder Kumar's term as NMML director ended last year and the society decided to look for someone else. One reason was that a BJP-led government was in power and that HRD minister M.M. Joshi was determined to break monopolies in academics

Hasan, whose work on the Partition of India is world renowned, and Dr Madhavan Palat, as well known for research on medieval and modern Russia.

But there were many problems. Mushirul Hasan was a member of the society. How could the society appoint a person from within itself as director? So Hasan resigned from the membership of the society believing that this would qualify him for the post. However, the ministry refused to accept his resignation.

Then the selection committee tried another tack. They forwarded a nominee of Dr Ravinder Kumar's, one Dr Neera Chandoke, who is a professor in politi-

cal science at Delhi University. But NMML rules say the director has to have a postgraduate degree in modern history. An attempt to amend the constitution of the society was resisted, from all accounts by H.D. Sharma and others.

Even while this drama was going on, the government decided to take a hand and appointed O.P. Kejriwal to the post. Left academics are aghast. Not only are they stuck with a nominee of the government, he is also a bureaucrat with only nodding acquaintance with academia.

Kejriwal refutes charges that he was appointed director of one of India's most prestigious research institutions because of his links with the *sangh parivar*. "How can anyone say I belong

to the *sangh parivar*? Not one member of the selection committee that recommended my name is from the *sangh parivar*," Kejriwal says he has all the academic credentials for the appointment: he is the author of *The Asiatic Society Of Bengal* and *The Discovery Of India's Past (1784 — 1883)* which have been published by the Oxford University Press. He pointed out that when Ravinder Kumar was appointed director, he too, had only two publications in his name at the time.

However, the Marxists say that the culture secretary, who plays a dominant role in the selection panel, has had a sinister role. They charge that while Kejriwal might not be a member of the Sangh, he was associated with the BJP during the Ram Janmabhoomi agitation and has been a regular visitor to the Deendayal Research Institute.

It is not just the NMML which has resisted intervention by the HRD ministry. The HRD ministry's role in administering another Nehru-Gandhi trust, the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), has been reduced to virtually nothing following changes in the trust deed which provide for Sonia Gandhi as president for life.

How this happened is an interesting story. On the recommendation of the Indira Gandhi Memorial Steering Committee under the chairmanship of the vice-president of India, it was decided in November 1984 that the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts would be set up as a national institution to promote the preservation and integrated development of all the arts.

On 6 November, 1985, the government approved allotment of 21 acres of prime land in Delhi along Rajpath to the tip of India Gate. Rs 50 crore was given to IGNCA as a corpus fund, the largest ever given to any government-funded cultural institution in the country.

Rs 25 crore was released in 1987 and the rest of the 25 crore between 1991 and 1995 when the P.V. Narasimha Rao government was in power. Rs 100 crore was also sanctioned for the building complex.

In May, 1995, the government decided to amend the trust deed. In the original trust deed, the government was to have appointed trustees: there was no provision for life trustees. This was amended. The founder trustees were made trustees for life.

The amended trust deed also appoint-



After Nehru's death and the decision to turn his property and assets into a trust, it became a sort of convention to have the Prime Minister head the society. So Indira Gandhi headed the NMML during her lifetime. Then Rajiv Gandhi took over and continued as its head even when he was out of power

ed Sonia Gandhi president of the trust for life (in the original deed, the president of the trust was appointed for a term of ten years). In the original deed, the member-secretary was to have been appointed by the Government of India. In the new one, the trustees were given the power to appoint a member-secretary. In the original trust deed, the President was appointed Visitor to the Trust with the provision that he might want to appoint a committee to review the trust from time to time. This was deleted from the new trust deed.



Also, the new trust deed exempted the IGNCA accounts from being audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

During the tenure of the United Front government, the Centre sought the advice of the law ministry on this matter. It was a tricky situation because the Congress party was supporting the government from the outside. However, because of pressure in Parliament, a reluctant government referred the matter to an equally reluctant law ministry.

It has taken the law ministry several years to give its recommendations.



The HRD ministry's role in administering the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts has been reduced to virtually nothing following changes in the trust deed which provide for Sonia Gandhi as president for life

When it did, after the Vajpayee government came to power, it said that the changes in the deed were bad in law.

The ministry is now wondering how to tackle the situation. Obviously, the IGNCA is funded from public money and cannot be outside the purview of the government. And yet a messy court case involving the government and the widow of a former Prime Minister, who is a current adversary of the government, is not an option the government wants to get involved in.

In the meantime however, the HRD ministry has realised that it has only a nominal role to play in the affairs of the IGNCA and is chary of getting involved with it.

Murli Manohar Joshi has been regarded with suspicion ever since he tried to alter the composition of the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), soon after he took over as minister.

Founded in 1972 by the ministry of education and social welfare by the then minister of education, Prof. Nurul Hasan, ICHR was given the task of "bringing historians together to provide a forum for exchange of views", and "to

give a national direction to an objective and rational presentation and interpretation of history".

The ICHR has an 18-member council and a chairman, all nominated by the Government of India. The term of office of the chairman and members of the council is three years, "subject to the condition that no person shall be a member of the council for more than two consecutive terms".

The present chairman of ICHR, Prof. S. Settar, from the Karnataka University Dharwar, was appointed only two years ago. But the terms of the members of the council expired in September 1997.

Left academics are aghast at Kejriwal's appointment. Not only are they stuck with a nominee of the government, he is also a bureaucrat with only nodding acquaintance with academia

So when Joshi took over, he nominated 18 historians to the council. However, a great fuss was sought to be made over this on the grounds that he had nominated persons with dubious academic credentials.

It is also true that many of the members of the council had been there for several terms: for example, Romila Thapar was on the council four times, Irfan Habib five times, Satish Chandra four times, S. Gopal three times, Barun De three times, etc. There is no doubt that all these are scholars of great integrity and renown. But surely there are historians other than them?

The Marxists say this is just a sign of the times to come. The BJP-RSS government will carry on being intrusive and will soon enter all institutions and try to control them if it is not stopped.

Joshi denies this hotly. He says he is acutely aware that he is part of a coalition government which is merely being led by the BJP. He can't ram home his agenda even if he wants to.

But he's already stepped on many toes. And it's beginning to hurt. •

Rajni Srinivasan and Aditi Phadnis/New Delhi

Khurana ver

BJP's two former Union ministers break the party code and slug it out in the media

He accused her of being a 'careerist', of becoming arrogant after she was made Cabinet minister and reprimanded her for carrying tales against him to the party high command. She called him a blackmailer, and said that he was responsible for the media campaign linking her with Romesh Sharma.

Both are former Union ministers from the BJP. While Madan Lal Khurana has risen from the ranks, Sushma Swaraj was a socialist before she joined the BJP and positioned herself as one of L.K. Advani's loyalists, thereby ensuring that she rose rapidly within the party hierarchy.

However, both have broken one cardinal rule of the *sangh parivar*: they have taken their quarrel to the media. It was Sushma who fired the first salvo when she blamed her Assembly defeat on both Khurana and Sahib Singh Verma. "*Ghar mein aag lagi, ghar ke chirag se*," she said pursing her lips in disapproval.

No one is quite sure what went wrong. Most party workers recall a time

when Khurana was the chief minister of Delhi and Sushma the general secretary in charge. In fact, according to the party folk-lore, the two were so close that they conspired against the then health minister, Sahib Singh Verma; and when Khurana had to resign after he was implicated in the Jain-Havala scandal, he apparently suggested Sushma's name as a replacement.

They were *that* close.

The letters shed some light on their grievances against each other. According to the missive written by Sushma Swaraj (and immediately leaked to the press and party functionaries), things began to go wrong after she became chief minister of Delhi. According to her, Khurana regarded her as a younger sister until the night on 9th October. But it all changed on the 10th (the day Sushma accepted chief ministership of Delhi). Khurana, however, claims that he was disappointed with his little sister long before she became chief minister. According to his reply to Sushma's letter (released at a press conference), he realised that Sushma was a 'careerist' as she became very arrogant after she became a Cabinet minister and refused to help either him or the party workers.

But more than their low opinion of each other, the war-of-the-letters is interesting in that it throws light on each one's *modus operandi*.

Note the manner in which the letters

Exchange Of Letters

Sushma Swaraj and Madan Lal Khurana trade charges

SHE SAID: *Mere khilaaf jhoota abhiyaan ched kar aap kuch naya nahin karenge, ye abhiyaan to aapne usi din se ched rakha tha jis din main mukhya-mantri banni* (By unleashing a false campaign against me, you are not doing anything new. In fact, you started this campaign against me from the day I became chief minister).

HE SAID: *Jin-jin logo ne party high*

commnad ko galat aur jhooti baat batakar meri chavi dhoomil ki hai, unme aap bhi ek hain (You are one of those who has been telling the party high command all kinds of lies against me).

SHE SAID: I now have no doubts about your role in spreading the rumours about Romesh Sharma and myself.

MADAN LAL KHURANA

sus Sushma

were made public. As is his nature, Khurana's disclosure was in the form of a press conference where he handed out photostat copies of both Sushma's letter and his reply. Foot firmly in mouth, he looked into assorted television cameras and referred to Sushma as a careerist and an opportunist. And just for good measure, he held a little sideshow and abused another of his enemies, Pramod Mahajan, as well.

Sushma was more circumspect in her campaign against Khurana. First she held a meeting of local MLAs at her residence. There she let it be known that Khurana was responsible for leaking stories against her in the media. And that one of the MLAs, Jagdish Mukhi had even warned her that Khurana was planning to hold a press conference where he would furnish proof of her links with Romesh Sharma. After which Sushma supplied the MLAs with copies of the letter she had written to Khurana and left for the national executive in Goa. The entire operation was one of stealth and intrigue.

Party officials gathered in Goa were also shown copies of Sushma's self-righteous letter. If Khurana intended to come out with proof of her involvement with Romesh Sharma, then Sushma had pre-empted him by making it sound as if this was the result of a personal grudge against her — just because she was

made chief minister instead of him.

Unfortunately for Sushma, she has little goodwill left in the party. The *parivar* which held her in high regard, was more than a little disappointed at the way she carried tales to the media after she lost the Delhi chief ministership. The RSS also did not approve of the fact that she gave up her Assembly seat in favour of her Lok Sabha one, and even indicated that she would like her Cabinet portfolios back.

Similarly, Khurana earned the wrath of the RSS by siding with Atal Behari Vajpayee on the issue of opening up the insurance sector. In fact, his foot-in-the-mouth attack of the *parivar* embarrassed the Prime Minister so much, that he was quite happy to accept Khurana's resignation.

However, Khurana has one advantage over Sushma: he is a cadre man and has a long association with the *parivar*. And according to party workers, he has made up with those that matter at Keshav Kunj. He has also offered to work the Jat-network and bring back Om Prakash Chautala's four MPs to the coalition.

Khurana may have made up with the RSS; Sushma will go back to being Advani's blue-eyed party worker (but not Cabinet minister) — but it's a long time before the two will make up with each other. •

Priya Sahgal/New Delhi

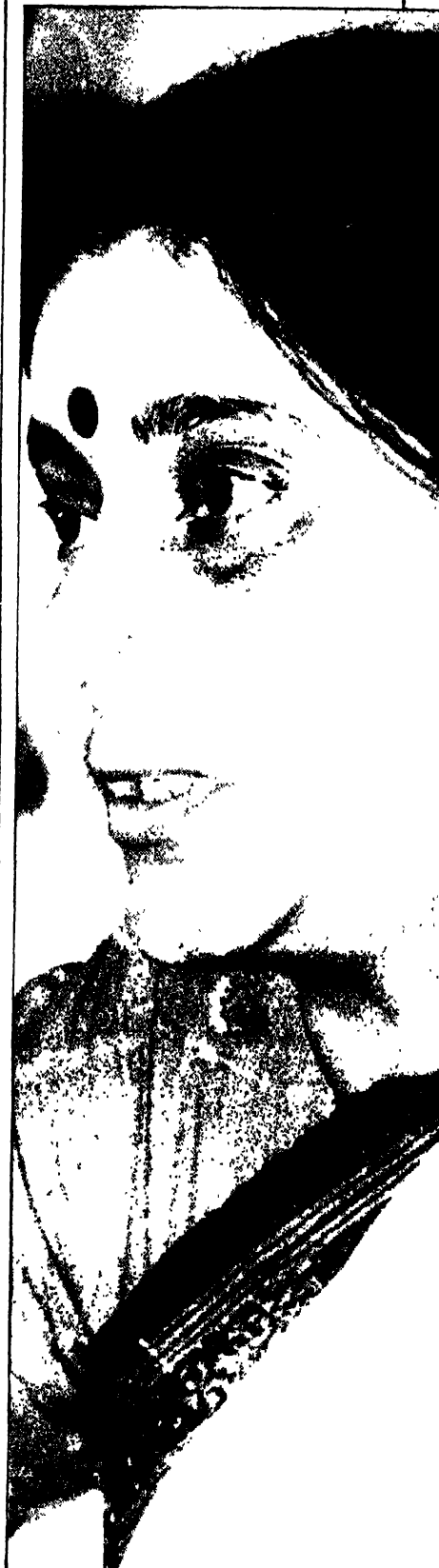
HE SAID: Sushmaji! This is absolutely untrue. From the very beginning, whenever any small item used to appear in the newspapers about you and Romesh Sharma, your husband used to call newspaper reporters and tell them that 'Khurana and friends are planting these stories, to spoil my wife's reputation'.

SHE SAID: Don't try to blackmail me...once you thought of me as your friend, as your younger sister. Keeping that in mind, I am advising you: please stop what you are doing. By destroying others and yourself, you will get no fame.

HE SAID: It is not my habit to scare

or blackmail anyone. It is not my nature to knife someone in the back...the truth is that I accepted you as my sister even before you became a minister. And having me as your brother gave you many advantages. However, after you became a minister I saw how arrogant you became; and this was reflected in your work as well. It was then I realised that you are a 'careerist'. You became so arrogant that you stopped doing the work of colleagues like me and of party workers...

I know I have written some things which I should not have. But after the kind of language that used in your letter — this is my reply. •



SUSHMA SWARAJ

While NATO warships and carrier-borne aircraft from the Adriatic Sea were bombing targets inside Yugoslavia, the cream of the Western Indian fleet led by the aircraft carrier *Viraat* (on its valedictory voyage prior to a long refit) put up an awesome display of its sea power off the coast of Goa in the Arabian Sea.

Twenty two warships including a submarine and 25 carrier and shore-based aircraft including VSTOL fighters were involved in a night and day demonstration for the country's national security team: Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, defence minister George Fernandes, national security adviser Brajesh Mishra, Chief of Naval Staff (CNS) Sushil Kumar and Vice-Chief of Air Staff Air Marshal A.S. Brar. Also on board the *Viraat* flying the flag of the CNS were C-in-C Western Naval Command Vice-Admiral Madhavendra Singh, fleet commander western fleet S. Mehta and commander *Viraat*, Captain S.K. Damble.

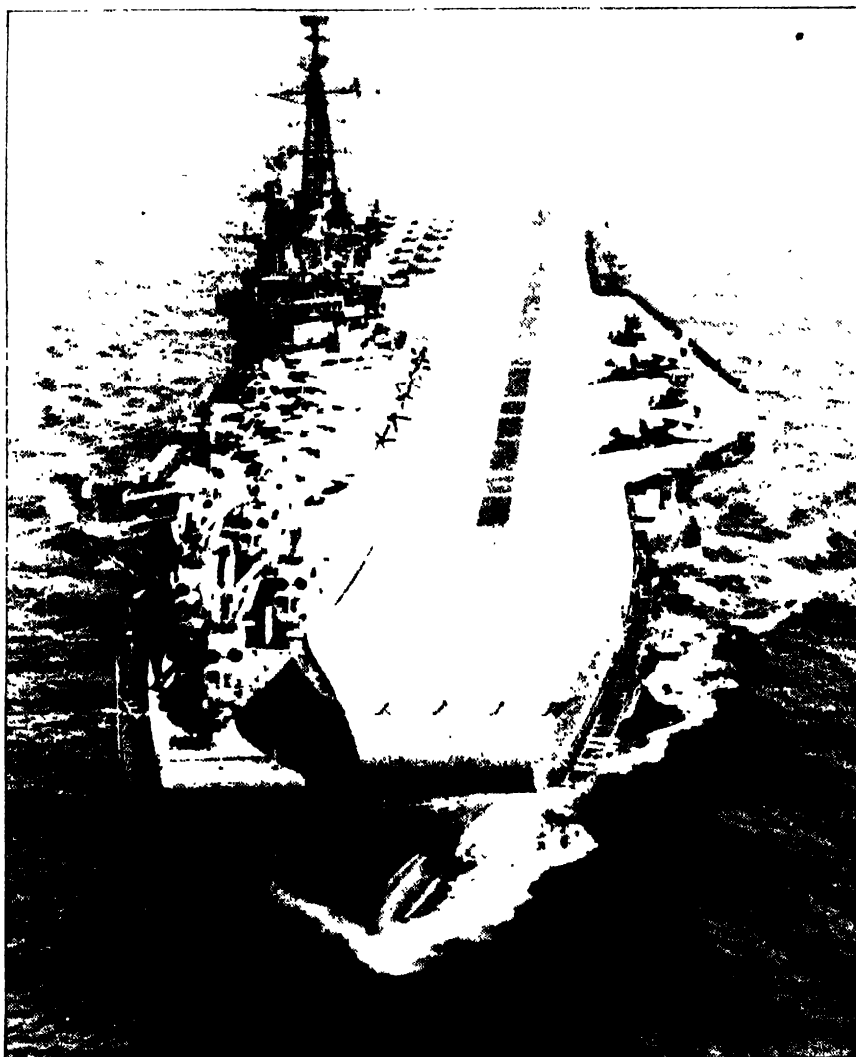
The *Viraat* carries a complement of 1,200 sailors of the 45,000 strong combatant navy (it has a force of 45,000 civilians to support it). *Viraat* is rightly called a floating city, the pride of the Indian Navy. The only incongruity displayed was the blanketing presence of the SPG which has not learnt how to be unobtrusive.

Viraat may be ageing but is unaffected by the Bhagwat virus. The officers and sailors wished to put the Bhagwat affair in dry docks much like they have INS *Vikrant*. Their greater concern was the inadequacy of attention on the navy's strategic reach and therefore, the neglect of its modernisation. Both these aspects were addressed only in generality by the Prime Minister in his *darbar* in the hangar of the *Viraat*. But he did inform the sailors that their unmet demands were pending with the Anomalies Committee.

The *Viraat* is a historic and certainly the most battle-hardened ship in the world. It saw action as HMS *Hermes* in World War II and later played a decisive role in the recapture of the Falklands in 1982. The carrier sits on an aged hull and foreigners marvel at the way the Indian Navy has kept it afloat and fighting.

In the Operation Room, the *Viraat* car-

Sailing On



INS Viraat: lord of the ocean

ries the slogan: One Who Controls the Sea Is All-Powerful. This is an adaptation from a bygone era when sea-powers ruled the world. The vitality of sea-power has not diminished, unfortunately it has not been adapted to the changed nature of conflict on the Indian subcontinent.

But Madhavendra Singh was quick to point out that India with its vast coastline was actually an island nation though still driven by a continental strategy. He

added: "The navy is invisible" (It was also a silent navy till a few months ago). It requires a greater share of the operational mandate and resources, he added.

As 87 per cent of the oil for India comes from across the seas or from offshore and 97 per cent trade by volume is sea-borne, energy and trade security are vital for the economy which is a function of freedom of the seas. Some 12 years ago, after India's daring and successful tri-service operation restoring the govern-

Ahead

The Indian Navy is in fine fettle



(From left) Admiral Sushil Kumar, Prime Minister Vajpayee, defence minister George Fernandes and Brajesh Mishra onboard INS *Viraat*: watching the firepower demonstration

The *Viraat* is a historic and certainly the most battle-hardened ship in the world. It saw action as HMS *Hermes* in World War II and later played a decisive role in the recapture of the Falklands in 1982. The carrier sits on an aged hull and foreigners marvel at the way the Indian Navy has kept it afloat and fighting

ment in the Maldives, *Time* magazine had put the recently commissioned INS *Viraat* and the nuclear submarine, INS *Chakra*, on its cover. This had a dampening effect on the growth and modernisation of the navy. Previously the navy's share of the defence budget had risen from 9 to 14 per cent. This happened not by any divine order but through the voluntary but shortlived reduction of their share of the budget by the army and air force. The navy's budget can only

increase in the future.

The navy's plans for three aircraft carriers — so that two — could be operational at all times — soon went aground. Similarly, the scheme to build the ATV which would have become the successor to *Chakra* was also mothballed. Worse, for the next ten years, no orders were placed for any new vessels despite every successive CNS and managing director of different shipyards, begging the government for orders.

The congestion of decommissioning of ships has had an adverse impact on trained manpower and operational readiness. What should have been by now a 200-ship navy has slipped to a 135 (including 18 submarines) ship navy. Fortunately, some of the slack will be picked up in the next two to three years when nearly 12 ships are likely to be added to the fleet. It is now almost certain that not only will the navy acquire the Russian aircraft carrier *Gorshkov*, but will also have its indigenous ADS full steam ahead. Luckily the navy also has an operational backup — the 100-ship Coast Guard set up in 1978.

Vajpayee was not told this Cinderella story of the navy. Till he came on board the *Viraat*, he was probably familiar only with the Bhagwat Puran. What he witnessed was a breathtaking display with six Sea Harrier fighter aircraft taking off in quick succession from the angle deck of the *Viraat* and disappearing into the clouds. Simultaneously the Sea King, Chetak and Kamov helicopters stood guard around the carrier, ready for rescue missions.

The entire array of fire power in the western fleet was demonstrated — anti-ship missiles, anti-submarine multibarrel rockets, anti-missile missiles, anti-surface and sub-surface rocket attacks and bombdrops. This was not all. There was a paradrop in the high seas followed by their retrieval. And a whole lot of operational manoeuvres and mock battles to tell the national security team that the navy was in fine fettle.

When the Prime Minister touched down on the *Viraat*, a Chetak helicopter carried a banner — the Indian Navy welcomes Pradhan Mantri. Twenty four hours later, before he departed the entire fleet steamed past chanting Pradhan Mantri Ki Jai.

At this unique interlocking on board the *Viraat* of the civil-political-bureaucratic-military leadership, only one person was damp-eyed: Commander Sudan, leader of the Sea Harriers. For him and for *Viraat* it was the last take-off and landing of the millennium. •

(The author was a general officer commanding of the Indian Peace-Keeping Force in southern Sri Lanka. He is the founder member of the Defence Planning Staff of the Chiefs of Staff Committee)

Meet the new breed of successful, with-it, white-collar cartoonists

The first R.K. Laxman book of cartoons was published by Penguin in 1990. There has been four reprints since then — each a bestseller.

Conclusion: cartoons make good book material and sell well.

A recently-held cartoon competition sponsored by a national daily got more than a thousand entries. The exhibits continue to draw crowds, even though none of them has been drawn by big names.

Conclusion: who says cartooning has yet to catch on in India?

Every national and regional daily and magazine has a cartoonist on the staff. Only that they are not called cartoonists any more. Graphic designer and illustrator sounds better and more hip.

Conclusion: you cannot do without them. They add that extra zing to your copy.

One of the largest money-spinning channels on television is the Cartoon Network and cartoon programmes, almost without exception, have the highest TRPs.

Conclusion: cartoon is big and good business.

Meet the new breed of successful, with-it, white-collar professionals — the cartoonists. They make their own political statements and wield considerable political clout.

"That is because they are no longer looked upon as back-room boys — ones who relax in a corner and only for a couple of hours with little or no homework. Cartoonists in India have got closer to reporting. Like any reporter they have to attend press briefings, meet politicians. Cartoons and caricatures are vital components of newspapers and not merely space fillers," says Unny, a veteran in the field and now working with *The Indian Express*.

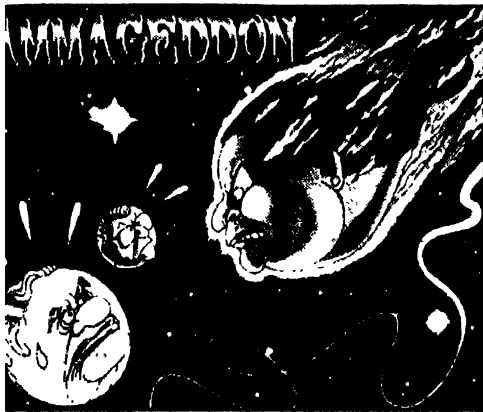
And he should be knowing because he has seen it all. Time was when all that cartoonists had to do was to scan the papers, look at a few pictures, sit at his desk in the evening and sketch a few lines — and hey presto, the day's work was done. But now cartoons are a result of long, intensive study.

Shekhar Gurera, *The Pioneer*, a new

Media-s



avvy



AJIT NINAN

"Unlike our western counterparts, we have no syndicates or agents who can do the marketing for us"



SUDHIR TAILANG

"There is so little to laugh about these days. We have to work harder each day to find humour and satire"

generation cartoonist agrees. "For a cartoon which has to go into the paper, my work starts early in the morning — keeping track of the events of the day, even though I may get into action only late in the evening."

Sudhir Tailang, *The Hindustan Times*, feels that a cartoon caricature has to change with the times. "Take the famous pout of former Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao. It has changed over the

years — having been accentuated over the years in political exile. Look at my caricatures of Rao from 1989 to 1991 — there is a world of difference between each of them. This means that one has to keep meeting politicians repeatedly — to figure out the change."

Something which is substantiated by R.K. Laxman in his book of cartoons. Laxman feels the boom time for cartoonists in the country was in the years imme-

Masters of satire

The story of cartooning

If you thought cartooning was merely a couple of strokes on paper, done with the sole purpose of raising a laugh, well, think again. Here is a serious business with a history.

Caricatures have been found on walls of ancient Egypt and Greek vases. The genre became highly popular in the early 1800s, when several British artists, including George Cruikshank and William Hogarth drew and sold prints of caricatures.

It was left to Benjamin Franklin to draw one of the first cartoons in American colonies in 1754. Today, the United States of America boasts of a throbbing cartoon culture. Franklin's cartoon carried a powerful message — that the colonies needed to unite. The cartoon in question showed each colony as part of a snake with the caption, 'Join or Die'.

Cartoons became a political statement in the 1840s in Europe, finding a prominent place on the walls of the French Parliament.

But the real impetus to popularity of cartoons came with the launch of the magazine *Punch*. *Harper's Weekly* followed.

By that time, cartoons had become a regular feature of newspapers and magazines. They, however, used fewer details and characters unlike the comic strips which were gaining in popularity. In India, the history is shorter. During the days of the Raj,



R.K. LAXMAN

several cartoonists lampooned the establishment and the prevalent social trends. The triumvirate of Abu Abraham, R.K. Laxman and Mario Miranda appeared on the scene in post-Independence India. Laxman's common man was your man next door — feeling the pinch of domestic politics and economics.

Today, several talents have joined the bandwagon — each telling a story, sometimes more powerful than the printed word. And no newspaper or magazine (national or regional) can do without them.

The top draw

R.K. LAXMAN: Began his career in cartooning with Bombay-based paper *Free Press Journal* and joined *The Times of India* where he has been working for over 40 years. Laxman has also written several short stories, a travelogue and essays. Known for his Common Man — the epitome of the struggling Indian middle class.

MARIO MIRANDA: More a lifestyle cartoonist, Miranda's cartoons are based on Goan lifestyle and culture. Was never much into political cartoons. Presently, his cartoons can be seen in *The Economic Times*, running under the name of On the Other Hand.

ABU ABRAHAM: Another veteran in the field of cartoons. Hails from Kerala



ABU ABRAHAM

where he stays now. Abraham's more or less retired from cartooning but one gets to read his syndicated columns in *The Hindustan Times* called Salt and Pepper, which he also illustrates.

UNNY: A senior cartoonist who began his career with *The Hindu* in Madras and is now with *The Indian Express*. Very much a political cartoonist.

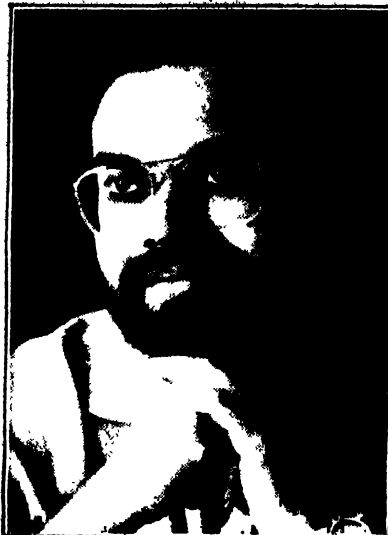
RAJINDER PURI: Used to be a politician



RAJINDER PURI

(floated a small party during the Emergency). Has retired from cartooning. At least that is what he claims though one gets to see his work occasionally in *The Outlook*. These days he is better known for his columns (called *The Wrap*) in *The Hindustan Times* and *The Statesman*, among other papers.

RAVI SHANKAR: His contemporaries



RAVI SHANKAR

call him one of the best in his field and a genius in political cartooning. Was with *The Indian Express*, has joined *India Today*. Nowadays he is involved in the managerial aspects of the magazine and is busy writing books. Cartooning seems to have taken a back seat.

SUDHIR DAR: Nobody knows what he is up to these days. Was with *The*



SUDHIR DAR

Hindustan Times and then with *The Pioneer*. He quit the latter when management changed hands. Was in the eye of the storm when he was selected by the Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR) to represent the country in a festival in London, a year back. Retired because of a back problem. Threatens to come back but nobody is sure when as he is known to be quite unpredictable. No doubt about his talent though.

SUDHIR TAILANI: Belongs to the new school of cartoonists but his talent is only too obvious. Draws for *The Hindustan Times* but more than his drawings, it is his punchline which stands out.

diately after Independence. There was so much happening — so many characters springing on the scene. He writes in his book, *The Best of Laxman*, "When Nehru took over as Prime Minister it soon became apparent to the cartoonist that he could look forward to an exciting career ahead. The aspirations of linguistic chauvinists, prohibitionists, name-changers of parks and streets, all began to make their ludicrous appearance on

There is better scope for this industry, but the whole attitude is one of negativism. Abroad, for a cartoonist the line of control is the entire world. Here it largely remains India-centric. Another problem is that unlike our western counterparts, we have no syndicates or agents who can do the marketing of our cartoons for us. We have to do it on our own."

Agrees Sunil Adam who draws cartoons for *The Pioneer*. "We are light

to them, sometimes forming personal equations," says Unny.

So does Tailang. "Given the fluid political scene, new political equations emerge every few days, Prime Ministers change frequently. This leaves us with little back-up material. And so we have to do our own research. Our source of information for caricatures are the subjects themselves."

But even the most optimistic cartoon-



SHEKHAR GURERA

"My work starts early in the morning, even though I may get into action only late in the evening"

the national scene. The number of satirical cartoonists increased rapidly. Our political activities became equally uproarious from the satirical point of view. Naturally, a cartoonist, even one with limited talent, could flourish effortlessly. Thus the tribe of cartoonists proliferated."

With proliferation came demand for better conditions of work. And they usually got it. More importantly, the cartoonists have come to be involved in the making of a story. The illustration is often the only visual accompanying stories.

With advancement of technology work is easier than it used to be. The computer takes care of the business of applying colour. Some cartoonists use the stylus and the electronic notebook, instead of the conventional brush and paper.

But not all are happy. Ajit Ninan of *India Today* for one. "I am unhappy with the cartoon scenario in the country.

years away from the West when it comes to cartoons. There are fewer opportunities and little professionalism. Only a handful have done well."

Rajinder Puri, who has been at it since 1957, does not agree. "During my days, cartoonists were well-paid and I should imagine that they are better-paid today. The fact remains that cartoonists are doing their own thing—making an individual political statement. No political leader can afford to ignore them."

That may be an exaggeration as the pen continues to be mightier than the brush in the world of print media. But the cartoonist has easier and better access to a politician, these days.

"This had to happen. Now look at Jayalalitha who holds the key to the survival of the present government. How can you depict her position in present politics and what she says and means without knowing her. Just as a reporter has to meet his subject to write about them, so do we. And this brings us close

ist has to admit that things are not always simple. Says Tailang, "The essence of a good cartoon is that while exaggeration is essential to make a point, the cartoonist must know where to draw the line. The entire piece must be credible. What is worse is that a cartoon is supposed to raise laughs. But there is so little to laugh about these days. Yet we have to work harder each day to find humour and satire and show it in our work."

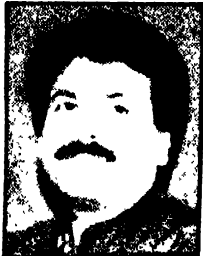
But there is a ray of light. Says Tailang, "Today's politicians have become a joke by themselves. They raise so many laughs through their own actions, where is the need for us to make satires on them?"

But as long as there are politicians and as long as things are in disproportion, cartoonists will continue to thrive. For here is a tribe which tries to make sense out of nonsense, nonsense out of what seems sensible, makes things seem larger than life and yet very, very real. •

Pallavi Ghosh/New Delhi

Systems failure

India must learn from Pakistan in selecting its cricket team



I must congratulate the Pakistan team for its performance of late. One should not be surprised if it makes it to the World Cup final. The members of the Indian team must learn

something from the Pakistani players. It looks like we have got a 'B'-grade team which is being sent to the World Cup. In the absence of just one player — Sachin Tendulkar — we lost to Pakistan in the one-day series and most of the matches at Sharjah.

It is shameful. A country of 100 crore is not able to produce one more batsman like Tendulkar, while a country of 14 crore (Pakistan) has got at least six dependable players. It is not that we do not have good players, but there is something wrong with our system which does not allow real talent to come up.

For Pakistan, if Saeed Anwar does not do well, Shahid Afridi will definitely do. Similarly, either Ijaz Ahmed or Inzamamul Haq or Moin Khan will definitely give sufficient contribution to the team. This they have proved time and again not only against India, but also against Sri Lanka and England. In our team if three top-order batsmen are out, the entire team will collapse.

Our players only win against Pakistan in moneymaking. The amount of product endorsements our players do thanks to the large middle class, the Pakistanis cannot. After a series is over, most of our players do not slog and practise. Either they rest at home or if they have made enough money they are busy making investment plans. Now it has been proved that a cricketer should also run like an athlete and work out everyday.

India requires cricketers and not fashion models who appear on television endorsing products. Unfortunately, half of our team comprises models. You do modelling as much as you can but you must play up to expectations.



It is shameful that a country of 100 crore is not able to produce one more batsman like Sachin Tendulkar, while a country of 14 crore (Pakistan) has got at least six dependable players

Javed Miandad had once told me that today's cricket is different as there are no real fast bowlers. It is very easy to play cricket today. But unfortunately, our young cricketers are not able to face current 'medium fast bowlers'. I think Miandad was right. The entire Indian team is not able to play Shoaib Akhtar and Wasim Akram, who are not equivalent to Marshall, Lillee, Thompson or Garner.

Imran Khan picked up school and college boys and made them international cricketers. He used to go to small towns watching tournaments and picking up good players. He did not pay much atten-

tion to the English-speaking skills of the players and rather picked up lower middle-class well-built boys with rural background.

In our selection system, one who is articulate, with a metropolitan background and good connections always gets preference. I think the Board of Control for Cricket in India is not at all responsible for it. At the district and state levels, recommendations matter a lot. There the real talent is killed and second-grade players are selected.

We will also have to devise a system by which boys of small towns and rural areas are picked up. •

HAPPY MOMENT: Chatterjee (right) with the Roy family



HEALTH

Immaculate conception

A Calcutta gynaecologist tries out an ignored technique for achieving pregnancy in infertile couples

They say there are always a thousand suns behind the clouds. The age-old proverb came true for Arun Kumar Roy (43) and his wife Sumita (35), and for Dr Siddhartha Chatterjee of Calcutta's Repose Nursing Home — their gynaecologist and obstetrician — on 5 April. That morning, at 7.55 am, Chatterjee delivered a baby boy weighing 2.5 kg by caesarian section on Sumita. In the process, he crossed a new frontier in the science of human reproduction: for the first time, a pregnancy was achieved by 'non-invasive Microsurgical Epididymal Sperm Aspiration (MESA)-Intra-Uterine Insemination (IUI) technology with frozen-thawed spermatozoa'.

This technique had not been considered before because doctors had no control over sperms after they were released into the uterus. But suddenly it is proving to be a successful but inexpensive technique.

"We scanned the medical literature and found no record of MESA-IUI pregnancy. Nobody has claimed such a feat either in Midlands (in England) or in India," said Chatterjee. "Based on this, I have sent my paper to the *Human Reproduction* journal and its editor, Professor R.G. Edwards, replied that my manuscript was being reviewed," Chatterjee added.

Although IUI is not a very precise technique, Chatterjee was able to deliver, literally. How was this achieved?

The Roy couple wanted a baby badly. The trouble was with Arun. Tests showed that he was azoospermic (absence of sperms in semen). His sperm motility was also very poor. "Arun came to me with only 15 to 20 per cent sperm motility, whereas a normal sperm has more than 60 per cent motility," recalled Chatterjee.

Moreover, though the couple wanted a baby, they did not want a pregnancy through donor insemination. They also lack-

ed the funds to undergo invitro-fertilisation (IVF). "We had faith on our doctor. So we told him to try whatever he felt was necessary. We're happy now," said an elated Arun Roy, after the baby was delivered.

It all began early last year. The couple was referred to Chatterjee by Dr Kalyan Sarkar, a urologist. At that stage, the MESA-IUI was just an 'idea'; it was still untried. So when the Roes told the doctor to go ahead, he decided to take a shot.

On 12 March, 1998, Kalyan Sarkar and micro-plastic surgeon Kaushik Nandi performed MESA on Arun Roy. They had to perform an operation on his testes to collect the sperms.

The sperms were frozen in the laboratory for five months in liquid nitrogen. During this time, Chatterjee and his team used biochemical processes to increase their motility. In May 1998, IUI was performed on Sumita and the sperms were pushed into her uterus. But nothing happened. Chatterjee then performed another IUI and this time it worked.

The method practised today to achieve pregnancy in infertile couples is through MESA and intra-cytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI) technique. The process needs a lot of precision and expenditure as well. The cost of disposables, medicines for achieving super-ovulation are very high, with bills running upto Rs 1.5 lakh.

But Chatterjee's procedure comes for much less. "Collection of sperms costs about Rs 10,000. And insemination will cost Rs 2,000 every cycle," he pointed out. If accepted, this technique will bring relief to infertile couples at moderate expenses. "It's a remarkable work. We want him to continue his research so that the poor and the needy can benefit," said Maya Ghosh, managing director, Repose Nursing Home.

But will his MESA-IUI technique be accepted? "Why not? Chatterjee's work is unique and is aimed at improving the life of people. His achievement will certainly be appreciated," said Nirmal Maji, assistant secretary and national council member of the Indian Medical Association, Calcutta. Chatterjee, however, sounded cautious: "Working in a Third World country, it's a difficult question to answer. It will take at least a year for things to clear."

What about the local and national forums? "I don't know how they will react? If the procedure is not accepted now, it will be ten years later. And that's fine with me," said a beaming Chatterjee. •

Arindam Sarkar/Calcutta

URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Big city blues

An official study brings out the changing face of Calcutta's population

The Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority (CMDA), the agency for planning and implementation of development schemes for the Calcutta Metropolitan area (CMA), has published a report on the *Socio-economic Profile of Households in Calcutta Metropolitan area: 1996-97*. The report has come up with interesting revelations concerning the city of joy.

Authored by CMDA secretary Nandita Chatterjee, Nikhi-



CITYSCAPE: street scene in Calcutta

lesh Bhattacharya of Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta, and Animesh Halder, director, socio-economic planning, CMDA — the report deals with the city's demographic profile, educational status, occupation and migration within the CMA area which includes 40 municipalities, three municipal corporations and 62 non-municipal urban areas.

The report confirms a number of hunches: that the city is turning more and more cosmopolitan; that migrants — mainly from outside the state — are slowly taking over; that the joint family system is passe; and that the sex ratio is strongly favouring the male.

The study shows that nearly 55 per cent of the households are made up of nuclear families, while the percentage of joint

The inside story

Why the JMM is not keen on bringing Shibu Soren out of jail

Leaders of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) seem to have dumped their supremo, Shibu Soren, languishing in Delhi's Tihar Jail for his alleged role in the murder of his own private secretary Shashinath Jha. Nowadays, they are more concerned about themselves staying outside the CBI dragnet.

Soren's erstwhile confidants are even reluctant to stage any demonstration in support of him. Talking to SUNDAY, JMM central committee secretary Kumar Varun said that they were not concerned about "Guruji's" release as it had become a routine matter for him to face trial. He, however, pointed out that the CBI had no circumstantial evidence against Soren to prove charges of conspiracy in Jha's murder.

Jha was an eyewitness in the JMM pay-off case in 1993. In 1994, he suddenly disappeared and his body was found buried at Nagri village near Ranchi. Observers feel that the CBI could not have made the breakthrough without a tip-off from those who had a vested interest in Soren's arrest. They also suggest that the same set of people may now be



ALOK MITRA

family and single-member families are 24 and 15.5 per cent respectively. Interestingly, 68.8 per cent rural households in the CMA area are nuclear families, indicating that the joint family system is breaking up even in rural areas around Calcutta.

The average family size has come down to 4 persons per family from the 1956 level of 5.2 persons. As for mother-tongue, only around 70 per cent speaks Bengali while more than 25 per cent are Hindi-speaking. Interestingly, a little over 25 per cent of CMA households have their origin in the present Calcutta municipal area while another 25 per cent has come from outside West Bengal.

A little over 84 per cent are Hindus while 13.7 per cent are Muslims. The report says that more than 50 per cent of the CMC (Calcutta Municipal Corporation) population and 35.5

per cent of the CMA population live in rented houses. The report also reveals that while one-third of households do not have adequate potable water supply, less than one-third is connected to any kind of sewer system.

Two important points concerning sex ratio and migration patterns also come out of the study. The sex ratio of 817 females per 1,000 male is rather low compared to the all-India figure. While it is as low as 770 females per 1,000 males in the below-14 age group, the ratio is a gentle 911 females per 1,000 males in the 60-plus category.

As for migration, with 1946 as the cut-off year, a little more than 20 per cent living in Calcutta are migrants. Despite the recent noises about Bangladeshi immigrants, the study reveals that the number of people coming to Calcutta from Bangladesh has actually gone down from 55.9 per cent of total migrants in the 1947-55 period to 0.2 per cent at present.

This also means that an increasing number of people are pouring into Calcutta from other Indian cities and villages. Halder feels that the migration into the city is more on account of the local push factors rather than the pull factor operating from Calcutta. This indicates that the eastern megapolis has a vast and impoverished hinterland which is failing to retain its population stock.

But demographers and sociologists are rather guarded while commenting on the report. Some even went on to question the accuracy of such a survey. They feel that such a wide range of parameters cannot be tested accurately on the basis of a single questionnaire, as has been done. Urban development experts are apprehensive of results which say that on the average, each person living in the CMC area enjoys about 85 sq.ft. of covered space.

Moreover, the study points out that about 42.5 per cent of



DUMP MODE: Shibui Soren

interested to see Shibui Soren languish in jail.

But the JMM leaders' reluctance to stand by Soren may also be due to bickerings among party factions. Varun is a diehard supporter of JMM vice-president Suraj Mandal and is believed to be working with his mentor to neutralise

Soren.

Despite the help from the anti-Soren faction in framing charges, it is necessary for the CBI to interrogate other JMM leaders. According to CBI sources, since Mandal is an accused in the pay-off case, the possibility of his involvement in Jha's murder could not be ruled out, at least in theory.

Meanwhile, supporters of Mandal are making an all-out effort to install him as the party president. On the one hand they are trying to erode Soren's credibility. On the other, they are frustrating the CBI's attempt to expand its dragnet in case they also fall into it.

Speaking to SUNDAY, Varun pointed out that the CBI probe into Jha's murder was based on a concocted story. He claimed that the pieces of skeleton dug out by the CBI at Nagri were not those of Jha. He revealed that one Gautam Sharma had fed the story of Jha's burial to the CBI. According to Varun, Sharma was at loggerheads with JMM leader Nand Kishor Mehta. Once, he was put behind bars on the basis of a complaint lodged by Mehta.

Meanwhile, Jha's mother has lodged a complaint in the Delhi High Court, accusing the CBI of conniving with some of the key accused in the case. But vital questions remain unanswered. Why was Soren singled out and why were leaders like Mandal spared? •

D.P. Sharan/Ranchi

Savi's story

After five long years, Hasratein comes to an end

Hasratein is finally over. This long-playing Zee serial, on the air for a little over five years, had hooked the audience from day dot because it became a statement for the loneliness of the long-married spouse. It began with Himani Shivpuri, the youthful wife of an old man, running away with a younger man, abandoning her daughter. This was not some siren, or a nymphomaniac, but your average garden-variety woman who felt unfulfilled in a passionless marriage.

The pattern remained the same through the story, based on a famous Marathi novel — the women in Ajai Sinha's serial were not submissive and long-suffering; they acted on their emotions and reacted to situations as they went along. The Shivpuri episode was brief curtain-raiser; the real action began when the little girl grew up, married, and left her husband for another man. It is Savi's story that *Hasratein* tracked, and though there were periodic grouses



ABSORBING AFFAIR: *Shefali Chaya in Hasratein*

about how long-winded it was all becoming, viewers never really deserted the serial. Originally, Savi was played by the lynx-eyed Seema Kapoor, but she indulged in too much heavy breathing in the process and was replaced by the grave, dignified Shefali Chaya.

This was a masterstroke because Ms Kapoor was making people uncomfortable by her overt 'sexiness'; Chaya, who had already made a mark for herself as a 'serious' actress, faced no approbation. If she left her husband to go off and live with a married man, she had her reasons — she wasn't a vamp, she was a heroine.

If you ignored the several icky bits which kept popping up, you could look at *Hasratein* as the first adult serial which spoke about relationships in an adult manner. And where you got standard acting from Harsh Chaya and Mrinal Kulkarni and Shefali Chaya, who play the husband, wife, and the Other Woman. •

the people in the CMC area live in slums. But *Environment Improvement Programme*, another CMDA release in 1996, puts the figure at 52 per cent. Even data on the literacy rate (around 90 per cent) has come under scrutiny. The figure for sex ratio is also not consistent with those given in the 1991 census.

CMDA sources say that two similar studies were carried out earlier, albeit on a smaller scale. According to Ashok Bhat-tacharya, CMDA vice-chairman and state urban development minister, the study was needed for Calcutta's planners as the city had undergone drastic changes over the last two decades. •

Jayanta Basu/Calcutta

MILITANCY

Mind battle

Militant outfits in the north-east launch a cyber offensive

The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) completed 20 years on 7 April. And to celebrate the occasion, the militant outfit has launched its own website — www.geocities.com/capitolhill/congress/7434.

In its home page, published by ULFA's international publicity department to launch a worldwide propaganda, the ULFA has claimed that the influx of people into Assam from the Indian subcontinent posed a serious threat to the state's demographic composition. The militant group has also claimed that the Government of India has all along been encouraging the influx of Indian and non-Indian foreigners into Assam because a population base having "ethnic affinity with mainland India" is always favourable for it. The home page gave a detailed account of the geographical location of the state and its natural resources.

The group has gone on to claim that Assam was never a part of India and the people of Assam defended their freedom as many as 17 times by fighting against the Mughal rulers. Interestingly, the ULFA has also sought suggestions from different quarters and even gave an e-mail address (ulfa@geocities.com) so that anybody could get in touch with them.

According to the ULFA home page, the aim is to liberate Assam's 78,529 sq.metre area from the clutches of Indian occupation and to form a sovereign Independent Assam.

The web seems to be providing a platform to other north-east militant groups as well. Following ULFA's footsteps, the NSCN has launched a home page to spearhead its demand for an Independent Nagaland. A lot of space has been devoted to the reports prepared by the International Ministries of the American Baptist Churches. Calling for a peaceful solution, the Church has extended support to the NSCN's demand. The reports quoted extensively from a write up of John A. Sundquist who travelled in different parts of Nagaland.

No doubt, the authorities are watching the cyber offensive unleashed by the militant outfits. The GOC of the 4 Corps, Lt-Gen. S.D. Shekhatkar, recently told newsmen in Guwahati that the army is keeping a close watch on the development. •

Dileep Chandra/Guwahati



SUNDAY WEEK

KUSUM BHANDARI

BEGINNING 18 APRIL, 1999

ARIES

(21 March-20 April)

Be positive in your rights. Something has to work out well for you, so you could have a taste of success that is obvious. Publicity could be good. You want to spread your wings so grab opportunities towards that end, but don't expect everything to happen at once.

TAURUS

(21 April-20 May)

Studies can be seen to pay dividends. A headway can be made in preparation for a new responsibility or a planned journey to a distant place. Children can be extra busy in showing off their talents. Be a little tactful in dealings with others. Friends can easily take offence.

GEMINI

(21 May-20 June)

Confirm a true relationship. You may have ended a period of flirtation and be thinking seriously about the future. Talk with the one you admire and feel more easy about what you are mutually contemplating. You tend to get a little bossy with your colleagues. Remain calm and try to compromise.

CANCER

(21 June-20 July)

Try to be constructive. This may mean throwing something out or having a complete change of attitudes. A decision may have to be made, or you may decide to put up with the result of a decision made by a partner. It's not the time to argue for arguments sake.

LEO

(21 July-20 August)

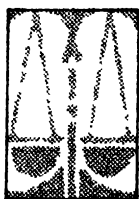
Take nothing too seriously from anyone. Don't let others get you down. Above all, you must stick to your principles, no matter what or who tries to make you change them. Communications can be unreliable. Things are improving for you, so be optimistic.



LIBRA

(21 September-20 October)

Be positive. Feel sure that you can get what you want and you will. Some misunderstanding which is out of your control may influence a deal and thus slow down negotiations and transactions. Someone you meet at work will attract you. This gives you a new sense of purpose.



SAGITTARIUS

(21 November-20 December)

Talking may get you nowhere. A decision over a property deal can go awry. Travelling can have its share of problems. You may have to put yourself out for a member of your family who cannot speak up clearly. Look after your own interests, but also be prepared to say things that may hurt.

CAPRICORN

(21 December-20 January)

If you think everything is topsy-turvy, don't be dejected, for things are bound to improve soon. Someone at work will be of great help to you. A romantic rendezvous can make you happy. Tread softly to be effective. Very soon you will be clear of your troubles through a court case.

AQUARIUS

(21 January-20 February)

Family misunderstandings can upset you. Follow your heart and do that which you know to be right. Someone may be willing to give you support. Social obligations may become a bit heavy if you count the material cost. But the benefits from mixing with people can usually outweigh the losses.

PISCES

(21 February-20 March)

Some feelings of insecurity can make you lose your spirit of adventure. Older folk may be a burden or be miserable. Try not to let your imagination run away if you get surprise news. An emergency will be coped with at home. Someone will reassure you.

VIRGO

(21 August-20 September)

Discussions can be most useful in order to sort out differences with other members of the family. Intimate relationships can be a bit uptight now. A child may be forced to come to terms with discipline. Settle a deal. Some financial pressure may ease out slowly.



SCORPIO

(21 October-20 November)

Something you could be doing could be out of date. Make a firm resolve to better yourself. Make it easier by getting together with others at work. Take care of your health. A bonus could come your way, that is not necessarily money. A journey can be made in hurry.



Real politics

There was no greater critic of the Congress's policy towards farmers than Chaudhary Charan Singh. He believed that the real India which was in the villages was being ignored by the Congress which had made its life's purpose to pander to city-based industrial houses.

However, things have tur-



Ajit Singh: own plans

ned full circle. The chief guest at the Bharatiya Janata Kisan Trust annual lecture is going to be Jairam Ramesh, a member of the Congress economic cell.

This presumably has something to do with Charan Singh's son Ajit Singh's own plans to join the Congress at some future date.

Fresh lease

The government's efforts to cut expenditure and wind up departments has yielded no result beyond rationalisation of existing posts.

But what it has done is give some institutions an unexpected lease of life.

Take the Board for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction. This was to have been the agency for politely telling public and private sectors to pack up if they were unable to run their units profitably.

However, the BIFR beca-

HEARD IN NEW DELHI

In sport you have a double whammy. In Indian politics, we have a double Swamy.

A BJP POLITICIAN ON MOHAN GURUSWAMY AND SUBRAMANIAN SWAMY'S EFFORTS TO BRING DOWN THE GOVERNMENT

me so mired in legal and other problems that former finance minister P. Chidambaram had recommended that it be wound up.

Before he could do that, the I.K. Gujral government had to quit and Yashwant Sinha came on the scene. If

truth be told, he too wanted to wind it up (because the job BIFR was doing was being done by others as well). And given his commitment in the Budget to cut government expenditure, this would not have been impossible for him.

CHECK-LIST

The Rothmans story: the latest chapter

■ **How it all began:** In 1997, Rothmans, the cigarette major, decided to set up a wholly owned subsidiary in India. The logic of this was not immediately clear because Rothmans already has a working arrangement with ITC.

■ **Why it ran into rough weather:** Because the FIPB wouldn't clear it. It didn't say so in so many words, but kept sending the proposal to various ministries, first commerce, to investigate if it would affect India's tobacco exports in any way, and then to the ministry of industry.

■ **Why Rothmans persisted:** Because it got mixed signals from the government. While the finance ministry opposed FDI in cigarettes on the ground that it was not a core infrastructure area, the industry ministry vowed to support — to its death — Rothmans' right to invest in India, because the proposal was in keeping with the guidelines

■ **But the hidden agenda was:** ITC's fears about its own survival, and also the fears of other cigarette companies.

ITC had another problem. In the meantime, Rothmans had merged with BAT, which had been willing to take over ITC. Rothmans held about two per cent equity in ITC, while BAT held 32 per cent. When talks began of Rothmans coming to India, ITC feared this was another attempt by BAT to take over.

■ **However, this was denied:** BAT has said it has no intention of taking over ITC.

■ **The latest situation:** ITC is looking to the government to save it, while the government has referred the Rothmans proposal to a core group in the FIPB.

But mysteriously, the government has now decided to beef up the BIFR. There is a proposal to post three secretary-level officers in the BIFR.

Of course, this means there will be three vacancies for the Centre to fill.

Look who's come to dinner

■ What is the real story about the reported meeting between Yashwant Sinha and Mohan Guruswamy?

According to a Delhi newspaper, the finance minister and his former adviser met at Sushma Swaraj's house where Sinha reportedly begged Guruswamy to desist from bringing any more charge against the government. To which Guruswamy supposedly said he was helpless because the Opposition had taken over and he was no longer in control.

The fact is nothing of the sort happened. Yes, Sinha did go to Swaraj's house for dinner. But there were 40 other people present there and Sinha nodded and said hello to Guruswamy, who returned the greeting. However, Sinha left early because he had a meeting. That was all.

The press didn't hear of another 'meeting' earlier between Guruswamy and Sinha. They chanced upon each other at Delhi's Taj Mansingh and Guruswamy congratulated Sinha for the Budget. If the finance minister had wanted he could have gone to town about this. But mature politicians don't do this kind of thing.

The real question which everyone should be asking is: given the current climate, Mohan Guruswamy is an enemy of the realm. Then how did Sushma Swaraj invite him to dinner? •

Going hi-tech

Information minister Pramod Mahajan believes in disseminating information as freely and easily as possible. This is probably why he arranged ten state-of-the-art-in-telecom technology Iridium satellite telephone sets for Atal Behari Vajpayee's team when the



Pramod Mahajan: reaching out

Prime Minister went to Raigad recently to unveil Shiva-ji's statue.

Mahajan was absolutely determined that this function should be covered thoroughly so he got a Dordarshan OB van loaded on to the plane so that the PM's function could be covered by Doordarshan.

However, just then news of the Chamoli earthquake broke. Mahajan sent the telephones to UP to help out in Chamoli — but only nine of the ten he had. He kept one, and it never left his side in Goa while the national executive meeting was on. It is still with the minister.

HEARD IN LUCKNOW

Bombay has a D Company. We have a T company. And we're not going to rest until we've turfed it out.

A KALYAN SINGH SUPPORTER ON THE CAMPAIGN LED BY THAKURS TO OUST THE CM

Saffron scene

Uttar Pradesh chief minister Kalyan Singh, already besieged by problems created by his party in the state, is absolutely furious with the party high command.

The reason is simple. Kalyan Singh reckons that those MLAs who came to Delhi to complain against him, should have been sent back to UP after being reprimanded. Instead party leaders thought it fit to not only give them appointments for sympathetic hear-

ings but also spent a lot of time with them.

Singh's ire is as much with the Prime Minister and the home minister as it is with the party high command. After all, if MLAs come to Delhi to complain against the chief minister, isn't this tantamount to anti-party activity? In any other party these MLAs would have been issued a show-cause notice. Instead a high command which supposedly supports Kalyan Singh feeds them *halwa-puri*.

Is the BJP listening?

CHECK-LIST

The BJP's options in Uttar Pradesh

■ **Send Mayawati as chief minister:** There might have been a double advantage in this: the BJP could have used this post as a tradeoff for support at the Centre. However, no one is biting — Kalyan Singh least of all.

■ **Replace Kalyan Singh with Rajnath Singh:** The Thakur lobby will be pleased as punch. But what about the others, especially the backward classes?

■ **Send a strong personality like Nrihari Manohar Joshi:** Who will override all the factions and will unite the BJP. But the question is: will he want to go to UP as chief minister?

■ **Make Sanghapriya Gautam chief minister:** He is a Dalit, from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, and is non-controversial. The only problem he may face is — no one will listen to him. What then?

■ **Kalraj Mishra as Kalyan Singh's successor:** This will keep everyone happy: the upper caste because Mishra is one of them; the backward classes because Mishra is not a Thakur; and Kalyan Singh because his successor will not be Rajnath Singh.

Caste factor

But there is more to the UP crisis than this. The MLA's in question, who are the target of Kalyan Singh's attack, say indignantly that all they want is to make sure the BJP's image in Uttar Pradesh doesn't slip — hence their rebellion — but that the Centre doesn't seem to be bothered about the party in UP.

For instance, they say, who okayed the appointments of corporator Kusum Rai (whom Kalyan Singh has variously described as 'she's like my daughter, her father was a close friend of mine', 'she's friend' and 'she's a party colleague') as chairman of the state social welfare board?

According to rebel MLAs, Rai's appointment was okayed by the central human resource development ministry. And who was the minister? Uma Bharti, they say. And, of course, it is only a coincidence that Bharti and Kalyan Singh belong to the same caste: they are both Lodhs.

Beijing calling

K. Natwar Singh's stock is soaring high.

Even though foreign minister Jaswant Singh hasn't yet received an invitation to go to China, (the joint secretary working group meeting is to be hosted by the Chinese, but no dates have been fixed for it), Natwar Singh has led a team of Congress MPs to Beijing at the invitation of the government.

This is being seen as an indication that at least one foreign government thinks the BJP establishment is on its way out.

And Natwar Singh's portfolio in a Congress government is secure. •

Citizen Narayanan

President K.R. Narayanan was invited as chief guest to a function which nearly got cancelled — because of him.

The diamond jubilee of the Indian Newspaper Society (INS) was celebrated in Delhi and Narayanan was the guest of honour. For INS — which comprises editor-proprietors of various Indian newspapers and magazines — it was a proud moment.

President Narayanan arrived wearing dark glasses and looking not unlike a film



K. R. Narayanan: a humble man

star — which was okay since he'd just undergone surgery. That he insisted on making a speech which was extempore, was also right — after all, he's been a journalist and that was a small courtesy INS could extend him.

However, he was not done. A presentation had been planned for those who were attending the function, but it was scheduled for after Narayanan had left. When he expressed the desire to stay on for the whole function, including the presentation, the delegates told him that they were terribly sorry but that was just not possible.

The reason? The briefcase which contained the presentation had been left behind in the car because security regulations did not allow bags to be brought to a venue at

HEARD IN THE AICC

Q: Why did the sadhus ask Vajpayee to go to Sabarimalal to pray for his government?

A: Because that's the only temple in the country which responds to the prayer of 'swamiye sharnam'

A CONGRESS ACTIVIST ON THE ROLE SUBRAMANIAN SWAMY PLAYED IN DESTABILISING THE ATAL BEHARI VAJPAYEE GOVERNMENT

CHECK-LIST

What is happening in Kosovo?

■ **The background:** After the death of Marshal Tito, the Iron Man of Yugoslavia, its constituents decided to dissolve themselves and reconstitute themselves as nations. Among them was Serbia.

One of Serbia's provinces, Kosovo, has a polyethnic composition — Muslims and Christians. Serbia (the army of the erstwhile Yugoslavia is Serb-dominated) felt that it was being discriminated against by the other nations and embarked on a programme of clearing Kosovo of its non-Serb population. It did this through the simple expedient of killing non-Serbs. All international protest was ignored.

■ **The players:** Mainly Slobodan Milosevic, the nationalist President of Serbia and countries which contribute to NATO. After repeated violation of agreements, NATO decided that it could not remain a silent spectator to the genocide in Serbia and the consequent refugee problem it had on its hands. Holland, Italy, Austria and Germany were particularly affected by this. So NATO gave Milosevic a deadline by which to stop killings. This was not complied with. So NATO began bombing Yugoslavia.

■ **The motives:** Kosovo represents a slice of history for the Serbs. It was this city where Serbs fought the hardest in repulsing Turkish invaders during the growth of the Ottoman Empire. It is the living symbol of Serb nationalism.

■ **The winners:** There are none. NATO, despite brave words, is terribly defensive about the bombing which, it claims is meant to stop refugees but is only creating more refugees. However, a diplomatic channel has now been opened.

■ **The losers:** The United Nations, which has been reduced to a cipher, because the bombing is an infringement of its charter and there's nobody to stop this. NAM because there are so many different opinions among members that no one can agree on how the bombing should stop. And the Serbs and the Kosovo Albanians: because they're dying for what they believe is their country.

which the President of India was a guest.

So sheepish smiles were exchanged all round as the President waived that regulation, sent for the briefcase and stayed for the full function. While proprietors gushed over him and told him what a *humble* man the First Citizen of India was.

Which was of, course exactly what Narayanan wanted to hear!

Calculated move

■ When the Bihar government was dismissed and the Congress Working Committee (CWC) debated the issue, there were many who wondered why Dr Manmohan Singh was arguing that no matter how terrible a state government, the Congress must oppose the use of Article 356.

For one, the party doesn't exactly have glowing credentials on this matter. But more surprising was Singh's passionate advocacy of democratically-elected governments.

If it had been anyone else, Congressmen, always generous and charitable about each other, would have concluded that his Rajya Sabha term must be ending and he must be looking for another state to get renominated to the Rajya Sabha.

However, Dr Singh was apparently thinking of long-term plans. Now that the Congress(I) is surreptitiously seeking a prime ministerial candidate and will seek the support of all allies, including Laloo Yadav, why not put him — and Mulayam Singh Yadav — in good humour so that it could pay off later?

That doesn't seem to be happening. But Dr Singh has proved he's a good democrat as well as a shrewd politician. •

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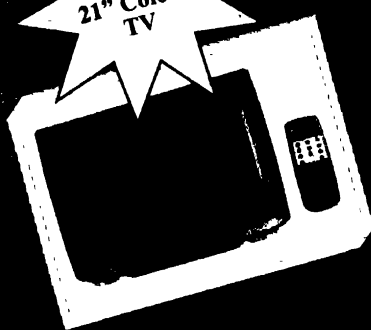
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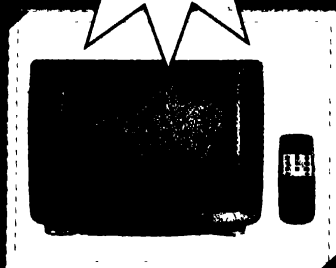
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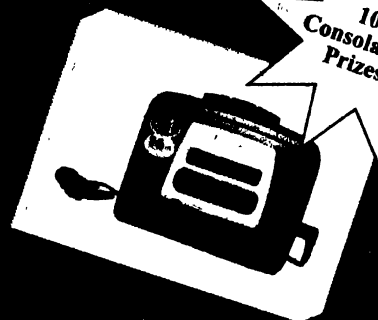
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VAJPAYEE'S FALL: INSIDE STORY

SUNDAY



VICTORY?

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Letters.....	4
Sight and Sound.....	6
Seen.....	7
Profile.....	26
Spotlight.....	40
Khaas Baat.....	42
News.....	59
Sunday Week.....	63
Business Diary.....	64
Random Notes.....	65
Delhi Diary.....	66



EDUCATION

Abort, retry, fail...

The road to the information highway can be bumpy..... 28

COLUMNS

MANI-TALK
Mani Shankar Aiyar..... 8

POWER PLAY
Rajiv Shukla..... 11

THE SOUTH BLOCK
Inder Malhotra..... 43

MEDIA MUSINGS
V. Gangadhar..... 56



COVER STORY 12

After the fall

The full story of how the BJP lost its government



CONTROVERSY 32

Thrown to the winds

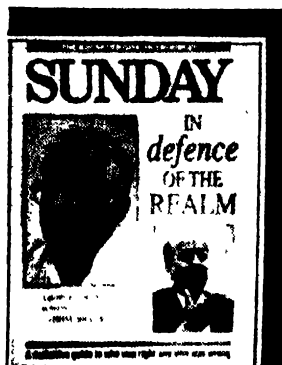
Alliance Air has little regard for crew morale and passenger safety

ADVERTISING 36

The bubble has burst

Sluggish growth rates.
Dwindling ad spend. Can the
Indian advertising industry cope?





Stop mud-slinging

There is no point in wasting reams of newsprint on a controversy that is proving to be a pain for the readers as well as the nation (*In defence of the realm*, 11—17 April). Instead of mud-slinging in public and making the issue more and more amorphous, why can't defence minister George Fernandes and Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat put forward concrete allegations?

For the last six months, so much has been written about these two characters. But nothing significant has been exposed. The Opposition has regaled in making an issue out of it. So much so that AIADMK chief J. Jayalalitha had used the issue as an excuse to pull out of the BJP-led coalition. But ultimately who is suffering? It is the nation and the defence services.

The issue has destabilised the parliamentary composition in such a manner that another round of general elections seems to be imminent. Result: a blow to the economy, uncertainty and a toll on the nation's treasury. As for the services, it has psychologically affected the men in uniform. Which is the most unwanted phenomenon that any nation would want at the cost of its security.

Ravi Chawla, New Delhi



George Fernandes: should have told the whole story in Parliament

■ It has been rightly pointed out that Jayalalitha has been backing the wrong cause. Considering that the Vajpayee government has virtually lived under a sentence of death, with Jayalalitha as the main antagonist, there was nothing unusual about its latest crisis. The only difference was that the AIADMK chief appeared to be more serious in her resolve to humiliate the government than ever before.

The needlessly provocative statement made by the parliamentary affairs minister might have also played a part in helping Jayalalitha to make up her mind. Moreover, the realisation that she has cried wolf far too often to backtrack once again has persuaded her to finally withdraw support.

Seema Chatterjee, Bilsapur (Madhya Pradesh)

Social concern

This refers to the story *The Union Budget* (14—20 March). The Union Budget is a "best" of the bad bargain in the existing situation. By increasing funds for the defence sector the BJP-led government has once again demonstrated its concern and commitment for the security of the nation.

The increase in limit from Rs 1 crore to Rs 5 crore to define small-scale industry will give a fillip to the small-scale sector. The scheme to provide 10 kg of foodgrains to all the elders and the aged who don't receive pensions, shows not only the social concern, but also that the BJP government is preparing to face the polls. The gold bond deposit scheme is an innovative one and if it

succeeds in catching people's imagination, then gold reserves will be surely used for productive purposes.

Finally, the scheme to involve villagers directly in rural upliftment instead of depending on the bureaucracy will eliminate red tapism and corruption.

N. Prasad, New Delhi

Carry on

The photographs of people affected by the radiation caused by uranium mining at Jaduguda, Bihar were shocking (*Waiting to die*, 4—10 April). I was deeply moved by the story. Thank you, SUNDAY for bringing out a real good story.

Pavan Sachdev, Patna (Bihar)

Not in a hurry

The profile on Sharad Pawar, *Pawar-cut* (4—10 April), made an interesting reading. True, the leaders close to Pawar will invite the wrath of the lady of Janpath.

Although Sonia has made her displeasure known, she is not in a hurry to get rid of Pawar as the Maratha strong-

Sharad Pawar: incurring the wrath of Sonia



man can still make or unmake things.

*Shrutl Nayar, Bangalore
(Karnataka)*

To sign or not to sign

This refers to the story *National consensus* (14—20 March). One feels pity for the Vajpayee government since it has to decide whether to sign the CTBT or not.

Sadly, India never rises above domestic dissensions in pursuit of national interest. In the past, the Congress had shown that it needn't bother about national consensus since it had majority in the Parliament. If Vajpayee government is able to survive for the full five-year term, it will have to take a decision on the CTBT. And it doesn't need the support of the Congress or any other party to take a decision whether to sign the CTBT or not.

S. Halan, Ithalar (Tamil Nadu)

Coalition conundrum

This refers to the story *Sonia's song* (4—10 April). Coalition governments at the Centre led by Morarji Desai, Charan Singh, Chandrashekar and Vajpayee (13-day rule) and the UF government led by Deve Gowda and Gujral all fell due to the inherent contradictions. The Congress supported some of these governments from outside and acquired a bad name in the process. The party shouldn't do the same mistake again. People are thoroughly fed up with the coalition government at the Centre.

Victory in the three Assembly elections in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi last year shows that the Congress hasn't lost

ground. In fact, the party might strengthen its position in the coming Assembly elections scheduled at the end of the year.

Sonia knows her party is not in a position now to get absolute majority in the event of a mid-term poll. In the present scenario, there is no point in hurrying it up and the Congress must wait for an appropriate time to strike.

*V. Gangadaran, Coimbatore
(Tamil Nadu)*

Withdrawal syndrome

This refers to the story *Jayalalitha in Delhi* (4—10 April). As the fate of the Vajpayee government hangs in the balance, it is clear what makes and unmakes governments in India today is pure whimsy. A few years ago, Sitaram Kesri brought down the Deve Gowda government simply by thunderously charging that H.D. Deve Gowda was communal. No evidence of Gowda's communalism was demanded or offered by anyone. Less than a year later, the Congress pulled the rug from under the I.K. Gujral government for its refusal to abandon a political ally,

DMK, despite the Jain Commission's indictment of the role of that party's leadership in the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi.

This time the source of whimsy lies within the coalition, rather than outside it. It is sadly clear that serious ideological issues are completely absent from our political discourse.

Ravi Kumar, Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh)

■ Given that it is the Bhagwat issue that has provoked a flurry of political activity at the Centre, it is even more curious that the rallying cry



J. Jayalalitha: finally pulled the trigger

among the other political parties is not national security or open government, but secularism. Their agenda in seeking the formation of an alternative government appears to have nothing to do with the Bhagwat issue.

*Sharmila Sarkar, Calcutta
(West Bengal)*

Getting the right drug

Lifestyle is changing and people are yielding to the terrific power of the pill (*Pill power*, 21—27 March). Today's markets are swamped with spurious drugs and dubious advertisements. And many are falling prey to such drugs.

However, there are good Ayurvedic medicines also available in the market that can ensure longer lifespan. Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mrs Bandaranaike who underwent an Ayurvedic treatment called Pizhisol in Kerala was all praise for it.

It all depends on getting the right medicine and the right treatment.

*A. Jacob Sahayam, Vellore
(Tamil Nadu)*

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Shatabdi Roy
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MILESTONES

DIED: Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, 87, grand old man of Malayalam literature, at Thakazhi, Kerala, on 10 April. The Jnanpith and 1985 Padma Bhushan winner is survived by his wife, son and four daughters.

DIED: A.K.A. Abdus Samad, 72, general secretary of the Indian Union Muslim League, in Madras on 11 April. He is survived by three sons and two daughters.

DIED: H.P. Nanda, 82, Escorts Group chairman, in New Delhi on 13 April. Nanda, along with younger brother Yudhistir, started Escorts (Agents) Ltd in 1944.

SENTENCED: Benazir Bhutto, former Pakistan Prime Minister, to five



years in jail by the Lahore High Court on charges of corruption. She was also barred from politics and fined US \$8.6 million.

APPOINTED: L.M. Singhvi, former high commissioner to the UK, as the new chairman of the Jnanpith Award Selection Board.

APPOINTED: Sudhir Deoras as MD of Tata International Ltd. He was with Tata Steel for 26 years before joining TIL in May 1996 as senior executive vice-president.

SIGHT & SOUND



MAYA KAMATH/THE ASIAN AGE

■ We want elections. Frequent polls are in the interest of the *bahujan samaj*.

KANSHI RAM, *Bahujan Samaj Party chief*

■ Just because one of our MPs — Kalpnath Rai — is disgruntled does not mean the party is splitting.

JAYA JAITLEY, *Samata Party general secretary*

■ This is the last Bihu of the millennium; let us all pledge to work together and end this saga of violence.

BHUPEN HAZARIKA, *Assamese singer, at an open-air Bihu function organised by the All Assam Students' Union*

■ Love and music are universal themes and people have been writing about them for ages. It's not as if Salman and I sat down and decided that OK, you take the rock route and I'll take the classical.

VIKRAM SETH, *author of An Equal Music, explaining that it was mere coincidence that he and Salman Rushdie were releasing books at the same time which revolved around love and music*

■ There is only a button to press and the government will go out of power.

SUBRAMANIAN SWAMY, *Janata Party president*

■ It seems that we have to win every game we play to keep the allegations at bay.

WASIM AKRAM, *Pakistan cricket captain, reacting to the allegation that their match against England at Sharjah, which they lost, was fixed*

■ I don't know why I am linked with men I am least likely to have an affair with.

RANI MUKHERJEE, *Hindi film actress, when asked about her 'affair' with Govinda*



SEEN

Waiting for Jayalalitha

But Amma was playing hard to get



RUPINDER SHARMA

DETERMINED SUITORS: *journalists at the Maurya Sheraton lobby*

For the foreign tourists who had checked in at Maurya Sheraton to travel within India during the much-hyped 'Explore India Year', the sightseeing had begun at the hotel premises itself. They rubbed their eyes in disbelief when they saw that the lobby was taken over by sound bite and photo-op-hungry journalists and cameramen.

"What's happening? Is something special on?" asked one tourist.

"Jayalalitha's here," answered an impatient and indignant scribe.

"What's that? Is it risky? Should we check out?" asked the baffled foreigner.

"She is an earthquake — worse than what hit Chamoli recently. You must have missed that one, but if you are lucky, you shall get to see this one," piped in a smart aleck.

But he had kind of hit the nail right on the head. 'Amma had arrived.' The tremors could be felt up to the Parliament while the epicentre was the plush Chandragupta suite occupied by the AIADMK supremo. And she was here to accomplish her single mission — to oust the refusing-to-give-in-to-her-tantrums Vajpayee government.

The journalists and cameramen camping at the lobby were guided by a single mission too — to meet Amma.

But Amma was playing hard to get. She refused to come out of her suite, while her flunkys kept guard. The press acted as the determined suitor — waiting patiently for the veil to be raised.

It was heyday for Jayalalitha's cronies and also for Subramanian Swamy. Swamy was seen escorting any minister or small party person coming in to visit the AIADMK boss to her suite. When surrounded by journalists wanting to know what was up, Swamy maintained a by-now perfected expression of 'looking important'.

A few media men dared to cross the line. Those who tried to reach the 16th floor fortress were brought back by the security men to the lobby. Frustrated, media men accosted any member from a small party to get an idea of the goings-on and when Amma would descend from her ivory tower. That was a hard guess.

By late evening, the mood was that of a party which had overextended its time. The media men were tired, though occasionally pepped up by the never-ending rounds of snacks and tea. Enthusiasm had waned and fewer visitors to the 16th floor were coming.

The only ones who actually looked fresh and curious were the few foreign tourists who still hung around. •

Rupinder Sharma/New Delhi

By late evening, the mood was that of a party which had overextended its time



Arun



For the past several weeks, readers of *The Asian Age* have been subjected to that learned theologian of Semetic religions, Maulvi/Monsignor Arun Shourie, expound in gra-

phic detail Everything You Wanted To Know About The New Testament, But Were Afraid To Ask. The Schoolmen did that a millennia ago, ultimately getting themselves impaled on the dilemma of whether or not it was essential to count the number of angels that could dance on the head of a pin. The absurdity of such dogma led to an Enlightenment, a Reformation and a Renaissance, which took Christendom out of the Dark Ages and into the Industrial and now Information Technology Revolutions.

That, of course, does not suit the purposes of the rank communalist that Shourie is. So, taking full advantage of the education he acquired from a college founded in the name of one of the great saints of the religion he now so avidly denigrates — St Stephen — and the good missionaries of the Cambridge Mission (which has run a college in heathen India for going on 120 years), who gave him the beginnings of the erudition he now passes off as learning, Arun Shourie dedicates himself to establishing that being a *namak haram* is the first step to Hinduism of the Hindutva kind. The question he now raises about contradictions between the Gospels of Saints Matthew, Mark, Luke and John should, of course, have been raised by

Taking full advantage of the education he acquired from a college founded in the name of one of the great saints of the religion he now so avidly denigrates St Stephen and the good missionaries of the Cambridge Mission, who gave him the beginnings of the erudition he now passes off as learning, Arun Shourie dedicates himself to establishing that being a *namak haram* is the first step to Hinduism of the Hindutva kind

Shourie And His Acolytes

Citizens' Commission Report on violence in Gujarat

him in the Bible class held at St Stephen's every morning. He did not go to those classes — because although there was no dearth of Christian fathers to teach him the finer points of Christian divinity, they were too respectful of his Arya Samajist beliefs to impose their theology on him. So, the Bible class was entirely voluntary. Non-Christians, who in our day made up close on 90 per cent of the student body, were given the option of attending Morals classes, which were such a bore that the more human of us (i.e., *not*, definitely *not*, Arun Shourie) would push off to the Univ Coffee House to ogle the girls. Shourie, above such trivial pursuits even at age 18, would take himself off, as meretriciously as he could, to the library — which is where he began the career, so successfully pursued since then, of reading up other people's books, then parodying them as a show of scholarship.

HIS ASIAN AGE articles can appear revelatory only to those not brought up in the Christian tradition. The points he makes, with the aplomb of a conjurer pulling rabbits out of a hat, are routine in any undergraduate divinity course at Oxford or Cambridge (not that Shourie can be expected to know this, since he was denied admission at both seats of learning for his academic standards not being up to scratch). But by deploying the same trick he has with Islam — which is to insist that only that which is fundamentalist is true and, therefore,



SONIA GANDHI: It is just that the Sangh Parivar, a trifle bored perhaps with Muslim-baiting, have taken to Christian-bashing as the flavour of the season. Especially as that amounts also to Congress-bashing: two birds with one stone, what?

any Muslim or Christian who adjusts dogma to modern knowledge is an apostate — he is now engaged in doing to Christianity what he has already done to Islam. His audience is not you or me or anyone halfway to being civilised, but the fanatics of Sangh Parivar outfits like Vigil and the Neanderthals of the Baj-

rang Dal who need someone of apparent academic qualifications like Arun Shourie to validate their atavistic urge to revenge. They would not understand a word of Shourie's turgid prose, but in whittled-down versions of increasing vulgarity and simplification, the *parivar's* propaganda machine carries these vicious prejudices masquerading as book-learning to the real audience — the goons of the *parivar*, as they sharpen their *trishuls* and load onto waiting jeeps their kerosene cannisters to set ablaze passing missionaries and their innocent, wide-eyed children.

There is a direct nexus between *The Asian Age* ravings of Arun Shourie and the atrocities on the Christians in Gujarat, for each feeds upon the other. The atrocities in Gujarat have been documented with chilling objectivity in the Citizens' Commission Report prepared by retired Justice H. Suresh of the Mumbai High Court, Prof. Kamal Mitra Chinnoy of Jawaharlal Nehru University and a galaxy of others, including the president of the National Alliance of Women, Ruth Manorama, and journalists Kiritbhai Bhatt and Rithambara Shastri. (Copies are available at Rs 100 a throw by faxing 011-6178622 and 080-6630262.) The most impressive part of the Commission's report is that it scrupulously records the testimony of not only the victims but the perpetrators, the administration and senior police functionaries.

THE GRAHAM STAINES KILLING: The *parivar's* propaganda machine carries vicious prejudices masquerading as book-learning to the real audience — the goons of the *parivar*, as they load onto waiting jeeps their kerosene canisters to set ablaze passing missionaries and their innocent, wide-eyed children



DANGS VIOLENCE: The most impressive part of the Citizens' Commission Report is that it scrupulously records the testimony of not only the victims but the perpetrators, the administration and senior police functionaries

WHY IS KORAN-BAITER Arun Shourie suddenly taking an interest in the Bible? For the same reason, surely, as the Hindu Jagran Manch is suddenly taking an interest in the Christians of Dangs — all 7,000 of them! Shourie's exegesis of Christian theology has as little to do with the impact of the Gospels on India's civilisation as the percentage of Christian tribals in Dangs has to do with the traditional tribal ethos of the district. It is just that the Sangh Parivar, a trifle bored perhaps with Muslim-baiting, have taken to Christian-bashing as the flavour of the season. Especially as that amounts also to Congress-bashing: two birds with one stone, what?

The Christians of Dangs constitute all of 5 per cent of the tribal population of the district. Hindus (if the largely animist tribals can be called that) account of 93 per cent. In not one of the district's 311 villages, says the report, do Christians constitute a majority. Extraordinary, is it not, that the "innocent and illiterate Adivasis" whom the Sangh Parivar and Arun Shourie are out to save from "conversion through deceit and monetary allurements" should be so immune to deceit and allurements that centuries after Christian missionaries stepped on this innocent and illiterate land (Dangs is a stone's throw from Surat, the site of the first factory established in 1600 and

something by the East India Company), nine-and-a-half of every ten Adivasis have not been either tempted or cheated into embracing the Church! The DSP says he knows not of a single example of forcible conversion in the entire district. Of course, he would not. Forcible conversion is against the law. Voluntary change of religion is a Fundamental Right guaranteed by the Constitution. Indeed, the most disturbing part of the Citizens' Commission Report is their detailing of instances of forced re-conversion to Hinduism.

THE REPORT ALSO shows how the education Arun Shourie received at Mission College (which is the name by which St Stephen's has been traditionally known) is not confined to Delhi and Arun Shourie. If Christian missionaries have made St Stephen's, as they have St Xavier's, Calcutta, and Loyola, Chennai, into the country's premier colleges, so have Christian missionaries made Deep Darshan High School, the object of the tender ministrations of Shourie's acolytes, into the outstanding educational institution of Dangs.

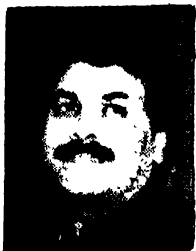
They have had a 100 per cent pass record in 1990 and over 90 per cent in the last three years. The district average has been between 19 and 27 per cent. Of the 840 children enrolled, a mere 100 are Christians; of a staff of 24, only 7 are

Christians. As in St Stephen's, so in Deep Darshan, Bible classes are optional. And as at St Stephen's, so at Deep Darshan, festivals of the major religions and national holidays are observed. It takes a mind as warped as that of Janubhai Pawar, the Arun Shourie of Dangs, president of the local Hindu Jagran Manch, to assert, as he did to the Commission, that Christianity is a foreign religion and Christians are anti-national. Pawar does not know, and Shourie is ashamed, that St Thomas reached India before St Peter reached Rome and that the Syrian Christians of Kerala are such an ancient Church that they could, if they wished, look upon the Catholic Church as protestant! And as for the secessionists of the north-east being Christians (a favourite Sangh Parivar argument trotted out by Janubhai Pawar), the Naxalites of Andhra Pradesh are Hindus, the Hurriyat gang in Kashmir are Muslims, and the Khalistanis are Sikhs. What on earth is the point of this point?

When I was a student at St Stephen's, we started a college rag called *Kooler-Talk*. Arun Shourie, of course, scoffed at such student journalism. But, extraordinarily, and certainly not as then planned, *Kooler-Talk* went on to celebrate its 21st anniversary. I was asked by the student-editor to pin a reminiscence. I wrote: "*Kooler-Talk* was started by Sarwar Lateef, Peter Philip and Montek Singh Ahluwalia. And if you have spotted that one was a Muslim, one a Christian and one a Sikh, then you are no Stephanian." Perhaps it was because he spotted just this that Arun Shourie wished to be no part of our little venture. •

Spin doctors

Political managers hold the key to trust votes



It appears that in toppling and installing governments political managers play a major role. If any party has three good political managers, it can easily manage a majority or top-

ple the government even if it is in a majority.

In today's politics, numbers game is such a vital factor that in order to manage it, you need to handle different allies, MPs and leaders. The Vajpayee government's defeat was the result of managerial skills of quite a few political activists of the Congress and other forces. On the other hand, the BJP's managers failed to understand Mayawati's character.

Those who managed BJP's affairs were Pramod Mahajan, Rangarajan Kumaramangalam, Venkaiah Naidu, Sukhbir Singh Badal, Madan Lal Khurana and Mamata Banerjee. Pramod had promised to give a tally of 260 MPs to Atal Behari Vajpayee and that he did. In fact, instead of calculating the game from abstaining of the BSP MPs, if they would have organised two more MPs, the government would have scraped through without the Speaker casting his vote.

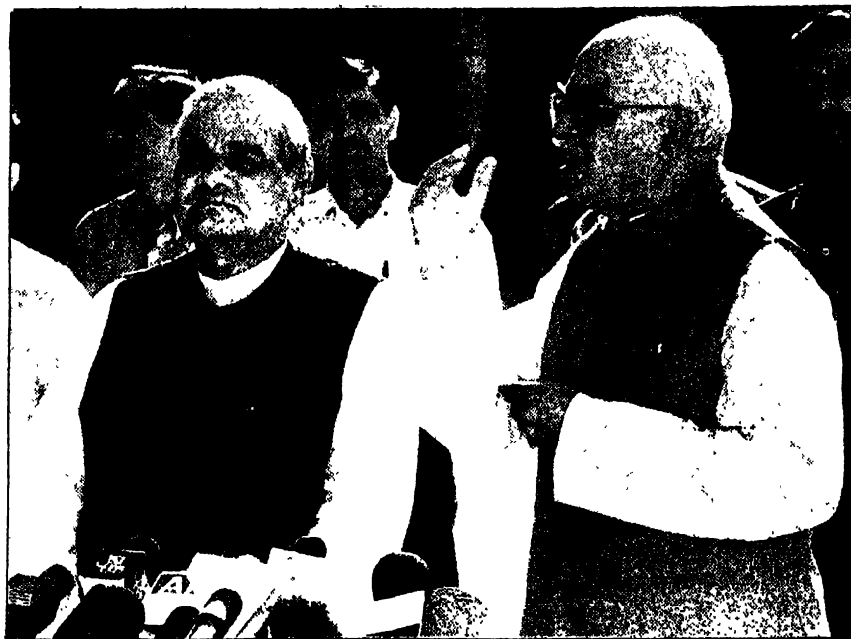
It is a wrong logic that the Speaker should not have allowed Orissa chief minister Giridhar Gamang to cast his vote. When he has not got any voting right in the Assembly, he will obviously vote in Parliament as a member of the House. He can only be disqualified by the Election Commission.

During the debate those who supported BJP speakers with lots of material against the Opposition were Sudheendra Kulkarni (OSD in the PMO) and Ashok Tandon (information adviser to the PM). Prime Minister's son-in-law Ranjan Bhattacharya played a major role till the last moment. He, Kumaramangalam and Mahajan worked in tandem to rope in various MPs to either vote for the government or at least abstain.

UP chief minister Kalyan Singh managed Kalpnath Rai at the last minute to vote for the government. He had also wooed Samajwadi MP Omwati to abstain and reinstated her suspended IAS husband, but she ditched him at the last moment. Kalyan went all the way to Bhondsi to make a last bid to cultivate Chandra Shekhar, but the wily Thakur

used his good offices to cultivate the BSP.

All these managers were not able to convince Moopanar and Chidambaram and finally Sonia herself took command and brought them into the Congress fold. Moopanar was in favour of supporting the Congress, while Chidambaram was reluctant because of Jayalalitha and



Vajpayee and Advani in the Lok Sabha: no confidence

from Ballia refused to oblige him.

Mamata, Pramod, Ranga, Kalraj Mishra and Lalji Tandon had spoken to Mayawati and they were confident that she would support them. But Laloo, Ajit Jogi and M.L. Fotedar turned the tables in the morning. Arif and Dumpy of the BSP also played major roles in getting their *behenji* agree to vote against the BJP.

The political managers who were busy in the toppling game include Harkishen Singh Surjeet, Subramanian Swamy, Sharad Pawar, P. Shiv Shankar, Arjun Singh, V. George, M.L. Fotedar, Ajit Jogi, Amar Singh, Bhajan Lal, etc. Madhya Pradesh chief minister Digvijay Singh was also camping in Delhi and

Swamy.

The most crucial vote of Saifuddin Soz of the National Conference was also managed by the managers at 10 Janpath. Interestingly, Kanshi Ram called up Vajpayee a few hours before the voting and promised him to help by abstaining. Vajpayee urged him to vote for the government if he really wanted to help him and after the final result Vajpayee was very hurt. It seems that crucial decisions of the BSP are now being taken by Mayawati.

In fact, before summoning Gamang to Delhi to cast his vote, Sonia had legal opinion sought from Kapil Sibal and Shiv Shankar and discussed the matter with former Speaker Shivraj Patil. •

THE LAST 48

What went wrong with the BJP's gameplan

This was no way to say goodbye. When A.B. Vajpayee stood up on the floor of the House, he spoke of Pokhran and of Lahore; he made a dig at the rivalry between various leaders of the Opposition such as P. Shiv Shankar and Sharad Pawar of the Congress, and Beni Prasad Verma and Mulayam Singh Yadav of the Samajwadi Party; and reiterated that there were no problems between L.K. Advani and himself.

All routine stuff. But then, Vajpayee had no idea that he was delivering his last speech on the floor of the House as Prime Minister — for a while at least. Even though the occasion was no less momentous than a motion of confidence in the Vajpayee government, the PM and his men were sure that they could pull it off.

But the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) should have known better. Its party managers may look street-smart (certainly they carry all the right accessories from reflector glasses to the latest cellphone models) but at the end of the day, the Pramod Mahajans and Rangarajan Kumaramangalams (despite his stint in the Congress during the JMM era) and even Bhairon Singh Shekhawat were just babes in the wood when compared to their counterparts in the Congress party. The Congress has fine-tuned the entire process into an art: their 'aides-de-defection' range from creative incentives such as pornographic films and basics such as Tata Sumos.

However, on the morning of the 15th, when the parliamentary affairs minister



A confident Vajpayee before entering Parliament House

HOURS

changing his mind. Especially when it's all for the 'good of the nation'.

As expected, nobody bought the last line. Soon rumours of a 'deal' began to do the rounds. The most charitable one claimed that the BJP had agreed to dump Bansi Lal during the next Assembly elections and to tie up with Chautala's



Jayaialitha with other ADMK leaders after meeting the President



Samata Party leader George Fernandes coming out of Parliament House

tabled the motion of confidence on the floor of the Lok Sabha, both the Congress and the BJP were sure that the government would win this round. This was evident from the lacklustre attack made by the leader of the Opposition (why bring in the Ganga Action Plan and forget all about Mohan Guruswamy?)

As the speakers droned on and on, the PM's men were busy working their cell-phones. Bhairon Singh Shekhawat was suddenly seen in Parliament hanging around Kumaramangalam's room. There was no sign of Pramod Mahajan — which was a statement in itself. If Mahajan was avoiding the limelight, then clearly he had something *very-very* urgent to attend to. Which could only mean one thing: he was back to his usual tricks. And the stubby Ranga was here, there and everywhere. His cheeky smile firmly in place, he hustled from the Prime Minister's Office to the Speaker's chamber to George Fernandes' room.

Some of this furtive activity bore fruit when the Indian Lok Dal's Om Prakash Chautala held a press conference at Sukbir Singh Badal's residence. Flanked by the Punjab chief minister, Parkash Singh Badal, and son, he announced that



Opposition leaders addressing the media

he was once again extending support to the BJP-led coalition. And no, he was not in the least embarrassed by his earlier statement that he would on no account vote for the BJP. But then, Chautala belongs to a different school of thought: he does not let a minor thing like a public statement deter him from

Lok Dal instead. And there was no mention of Tata Sumos or their equivalent thereof.

After ensuring the Lok Dal's support, the BJP began to work on the TMC. Initially, they were told that the TMC would do anything to keep Jayalalitha out of power. Even if that meant voting for the

BJP. For obvious reasons, it was not P. Chidambaram's former colleague from Tamil Nadu who initiated the dialogue with the TMC. Very wisely, Ranga let M. Karunanidhi and Mahajan handle the dialogue.

And just when it seemed that the TMC would abstain, the Congress played its trump card. Sonia Gandhi asked G.K. Moopanar to call on her and assured him that the AIADMK would not be part of the new government. The minute the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) got to know that Sonia had met Moopanar, they knew that the game was up as far as the three TMC votes were concerned. But reports kept coming in that while Moopanar had agreed, P. Chidambaram was putting up a tough fight. However, at 12.30 am, when Chidambaram got up to speak, it was clear which side he was on.

By the end of the second day, the BJP had won one round, and lost the other. However, they were still confident that they could pull it off: hadn't the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) promised to abstain? (Since when did the likes of Ranga, Shekhawat and Mahajan become so naive and trusting?)

So, Pramod Mahajan and Venkaiah Naidu started discussing cricket scores instead of Parliament figures, Shakti Sinha decided to finish reading his book and a sleepy-looking Vijay Goel was sent to the Lok Sabha to persuade Vajpayee to rest in his room in Parliament. (Although the BJP had issued a whip for all members to be present, this rule was relaxed late at night but Vajpayee wanted to set an example. So that night, the lights burned in the Prime Minister's office till 5.30 am.)

Unfortunately for the BJP, the Congress also did not sleep that night. And the party managers did not spend that time watching cricket or reading books.

Then again, Mayawati had set a precedent of sorts. She even beat Chautala in his game of double-speak: for she went back on what she had stated not just in front of television cameras, but on the floor of the House. In fact, at 10.20 am, a couple of hours before the voting, both Mayawati and Kanshi Ram spoke to Vajpayee. While Kanshi Ram assured him of his support, Mayawati went a step further and said that not only would her MPs abstain, they won't even enter Parliament. (And this was well after she had been persuaded by the Congress to change her mind.)



**Subramanian Swamy with
O.P. Chautala at the
Maurya Sheraton hotel
in New Delhi**

So, the morning before the vote there were smiles all around in Parliament. The Congress camp was grinning — Ajit Jogi even more than usual — and the BJP had an equally smug look. They chided reports that the BSP had switched sides, saying that the BJP would go by what had been promised on the floor of the House. When a Samajwadi Party MP contacted the BJP strategists and told them that he had heard that Mayawati had switched over to the Congress, but perhaps some kind of an arrangement could be worked out with the Samajwadi Party whereby a few of their MPs would absent themselves during the vote, he was not taken seriously at all.

Even the question of Giridhar Gamang's voting rights was raised more as a formality than a serious attempt to sabotage that one vote. Otherwise, why

would the Speaker depend on a ruling handed out to him by S. Gopalan, the secretary-general of the Lok Sabha and a man not really known for his undying loyalty to the BJP? In any event, the BJP knew that they were going to raise this. The very least that the party MPs could have done was to ensure that the Speaker was given an 'appropriate' ruling to support their stand. Arjun Singh and Sharad Pawar would never slip up and let a politician 'vote according to his conscience'. For they know only too well what a fickle commodity that is.

However, once Kumaramangalam and Co. saw Mayawati walk into Parliament, they realised that something was wrong. Hadn't she just told the PM that she won't even enter the House? But it was only during the electronic voting that they realised the full extent of her betrayal. When the scoreboard lit up, the MPs saw that the number of people who abstained from voting was just one. If Mayawati and her men had done as promised then that figure should have read five.

A jubilant Subramanian Swamy (who



in their eyes. Even Vajpayee's old friend, Jaswant Singh did away with his stiff look and wept a little. A visibly-upset Namita, the PM's foster-daughter, was at hand to console him. "What is the protocol? What do we do now?" she asked. "When do we have to shift out?" But then, she should have known better. As far as Vajpayee is concerned, there is no protocol. He sets his own pace: which is to shift out of Race Course Road as soon as possible, long before the next PM is sworn in.

As Vajpayee went to chair his last Cabinet meeting, he smiled at reporters standing outside and saluted them with a hearty *namaskar*. Gone was his sleepy, listless look. He knew that he may have lost the vote, but he had won the country. The conversation outside Room No 9 in Parliament almost sounded like an obituary. Even those who were glad to see the BJP lose, felt sorry for the PM that day.

And a lot of this had to do with his charm and easy accessibility. For Vajpayee had set his own rules. MPs discussed how easy it had been to get an appointment with him while reporters rued the loss of a PMO that offered you news (most of it on the TV set in the room), childish jokes and endless cups of coffee. And the right to walk in without an appointment.

was sitting behind Mayawati) flashed the V-signal and pointed to Mayawati. Sharad Pawar, Ajit Jogi and Laloo Yadav dashed upto '*behenji*' and shook her hand. Mulayam Singh Yadav did no such thing. Laloo then walked upto Ram Vilas Paswan and patted him on the back: Paswan had threatened to break away from the Janata Dal and vote for the BJP. But he hadn't. And Laloo — being Laloo — could have hugged Paswan at that moment.

But clearly, it was Mayawati who was the star of the show. Glumly, a BJP MP counted the gold chains around her neck and wondered if the diamond glittering on her nose seemed larger than usual. From here on, she was referred to as Madam Maya.

However, all that was much later. At the moment, the Treasury benches were still numb with shock: we lost by just one vote?

Dazed party MPs made their way to the PM's room. In the gallery outside, S. Gurumurthy, Swadesi Jagran Manch chief and a Vajpayee-baiter, was speak-



S. Gurumurthy



Sharad Pawar



Mayawati

ing to an ashen-faced Uma Bharti. He was mumbling something about 'undemocratic alliances'.

A sombre George Fernandes spoke to Brajesh Mishra and said that the President would have to ensure that the next coalition had more than 269 signatures of support before he invited anyone to stake claim. An ailing Vijayaraje Scindia was wheeled out on her wheel-chair by her two daughters. She had cast her vote but failed to save the party.

The younger lot was more emotional. Venkaiah, Mahajan and Ranga had tears

Meeting over, the Prime Minister went to Rashtrapati Bhavan. Venkaiah Naidu sat down to draft the press release for the day ("Where is the newspaper cutting where Jayalalitha had said she would fight tooth-and-nail to oppose Sonia becoming PM?" he asked); Ranga stood on his toes and tried to wipe the tears of a party worker; Vijay Goel tried to 'politically analyse' the situation; Mahajan put on his dark glasses and went to brief the press.

It was business as usual. •
Priya Sahgal/New Delhi

The SONIA

The BJP government came down because Sonia Gandhi decided to bring it



EFFECT

own. How will she manage her allies now?

Reporters on the Rashtrapati Bhavan beat first sensed something was on when Congress president Sonia Gandhi sought a 45-minute meeting with President K.R. Narayanan in early March this year.

In March last year, when A.B. Vaj-

every passing day, Vajpayee was consolidating himself. Whether it was the Budget, or his Lahore trip, or the Congress's ill-advised stand on the dismissal of the Bihar government following a carnage of Dalits (the Congress was opposed to the dismissal), every day brought bad news. If the BJP was not

trail. So November 1999 was the right time to strike. If the Congress managed to prove itself, it would be the party to take India into the next millennium.

However, Congress leaders counselled more rapid action. At a meeting of the Congress Working Committee (CWC), they explained how the BJP was permeating the bureaucracy and the government. Soon it would become impossible to dislodge it. It wasn't a good idea to wait till November.

Even as Sonia Gandhi was mulling over the matter, something happened in March which made her change her mind.

This is the key to India's current political crisis. Why did Sonia Gandhi, so reluctant to bring down the BJP government just now, change her decision so quickly that, in 48 hours, from being the ruling government in India, the BJP went into the Opposition? Why was a clearly ill-prepared Congress fumbling and stumbling at Operation Topple, something they're known to be good at? Why did Sonia Gandhi suddenly decide that the BJP government had to go?

The Congress still has many friends in the bureaucracy. In March, Sonia got information that the government had decided to move on the Bofors case.

For the past one year, BJP politicians had been telling each other they were mystified by Vajpayee's apparent cordiality towards Sonia Gandhi. The government had done nothing to investigate the various foundations of which Sonia Gandhi was member and chairman; there had been no political attack on Sonia Gandhi by the BJP. It was almost as if the BJP had sworn off the Congress leader.

However, it was home minister L.K. Advani who reportedly ran out of patience. Mrs Gandhi was informed that the home ministry had prepared a notification about its intention to prosecute some of those involved in the Bofors case.

Chief ministers in Delhi: who did what



Giridhar Gamang

M. Karunanidhi: The Tamil Nadu chief minister was the hero of the show as far as the BJP was concerned. Once he'd decided to help his old friend Vajpayee, he pulled out all stops. But it was too little, too late.

Parkash Singh Badal: Was the one who used his former credentials to bring round O.P. Chautala, the psychological point when the mood of the government turned.

Chandrababu Naidu: Till the last, tried to help out the BJP. Spoke to M. Karunanidhi to thrash out

a joint programme to save the BJP.

Giridhar Gamang: The Congress's saviour. Bailed the Congress out with his vote, the vote that finally caused the government to fall.

Digvijay Singh: Stayed put in Delhi till the drama was over. Was in touch with the Samajwadi Party.



M. Karunanidhi

payee assumed office as PM, the Congress told itself that this was a welcome respite. It could use its stint in the Opposition to put its house in order. In the meantime, an inexperienced BJP would certainly mess things up for itself. Then a rejuvenated Congress under Sonia Gandhi's leadership would step in and rescue a weary nation from chaos and communalism.

However, Congress leaders began to sense that things were not going according to this script some months ago. Her supporters began warning her that with

stopped, it would devour everyone.

Sonia Gandhi held her own. She listened but didn't hear. For her the target was November. Assembly elections to more than nine states were due in November. There was a consensus that the Congress would win Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, may be also Goa, and retain Orissa. When that happened, an atmosphere of victory could be created in favour of the Congress. People would recognise Sonia Gandhi's leadership of the Congress and acknowledge that it was on a comeback

Breaking Up Is Hard To Do

Why it will be difficult for the Congress to break away the BJP's supporters

BIJU JANATA DAL

• Was formed out of the erstwhile Janata Dal in Orissa. After the death of Biju Patnaik, his son Naveen Patnaik was chosen to head the BJD. It won nine seats in the Lok Sabha elections and decided to ally with the BJP.

There are several members of the BJD who believe Patnaik is a weak and effete leader. Realising the potential of a rebellion, former Congress chief minister J.B. Patnaik had tried to intercede and offer the BJD rebels the Congress umbrella.

However, those negotiations came to nought because J.B. Patnaik faced resentment from among his own partymen for negotiating with these rebels. Sitting as well as defeated Congress MLAs and MPs felt threatened by the competition that the BJD could offer if it came into the Congress.

The BJD leaders are clear that their

fight is against the leadership of their party — their fight is not to join and be swallowed up by the leadership of the Congress.

The state Congress is asking itself what it can possibly offer the BJD without risking a rebellion in its own ranks — given the fact that elections are round the corner.

Chances of BJD crossing
the floor

4
10

SAMATA PARTY

• For the last one year, Congressmen have been predicting that the Samata Party will break in Bihar, leading to a sympathetic split in Delhi.

There are several problems with this. The most important is the

numerical problem. Samata Party has 13 MPs (a nominated Anglo-Indian MP joined the party later). In order to qualify for a split, a rebel group needs at least five MPs. However, the number of rebels is not crossing three.

The foremost among them is Shakuni Chowdhury, the Keori leader who is opposed to Nitish Kumar. Chowdhury's grouse is that Nitish Kumar, also a Keori, was made minister instead of him. Chowdhury was earlier in the Congress and, therefore, has many friends there. He reckons that if there is a chance of the Congress forming the government he should shift sides now.

However, if he does that he risks the anti-defection law.

The other two rebels in the Samata Party are Abdul Ghafoor, another leader who was once in a Congress



J.B. Patnaik



Naveen Patnaik



Paswan



Deve Gowda

Those to be prosecuted were Madhav-sinh Solanki, who carried a letter from then PM P.V. Narasimha Rao to Swiss authorities, reportedly asking them to slow down the Bofors Commission investigations, and Ottavio Quattrocchi, the legendary 'Q' in the Martin Ardbo diaries.

And then, the most damning disclosure. The BJP government was also planning to prosecute assassinated Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

According to these sources, the Prime Minister had first held back, and then given clearance to the prosecution. Quattrocchi was abroad and would have to be extradited for the prosecution and Rajiv Gandhi was dead. However, Madhav-

sinh Solanki was very much around.

The saving grace was that Solanki had carried the letter to the Swiss authorities in his capacity as a minister. He therefore had immunity. So to prosecute him, the President of India had to be informed and his concurrence taken.

When Sonia Gandhi met Narayanan in March, the President reportedly hinted that she should be prepared for a shock. Her dead husband was going to be pilloried by the BJP. In some ways, this was the BJP's answer to the Havala case — which was used by P.V. Narasimha Rao to 'fix' political rivals.

This was not the only parallel to the Havala case. Bureaucrats who know, say that the Bofors case is nowhere near

fruition: the investigations are far from complete and that the home minister was told as much. But the bureaucracy told itself that despite being cautioned if the BJP had decided to go ahead with prosecution, obviously it was a political and not an administrative move.

The file seeking presidential sanction for the Solanki prosecution was sent to Rashtrapati Bhavan early this year. It is yet to be returned to the home ministry with the President's assent.

Sonia Gandhi returned to 10 Janpath angry and worried. For one year, the Vajpayee government had stayed out of her life. Now it was threatening to use its position to hit back at her, her family and

government and who is unhappy he's not a minister; and Kalpnath Rai, the MP who is unhappy in any party which doesn't make him minister.

In any event, as the rebels lose their seats if they change sides, there have to be really compelling reasons for them to do so.

Chances of Samata Party $\frac{2}{10}$
crossing the floor

TELUGU DESAM PARTY

- The Telugu Desam leader, Chandrababu Naidu, has declared that its alliance with the BJP — such as it was — is over. But it will be impossible for him to support a Congress government, especially as Assembly elections are due in Andhra Pradesh in November and the Congress is his principal enemy.

It is another matter if the Congress attempts to break away TDP MPs to form a separate group which will support it. But that doesn't seem likely at the moment.

Chances of TDP crossing $\frac{2}{10}$
the floor

JANATA DAL

- Was not a supporter of the BJP, but

the Congress party. So it had to be stopped.

That's when she decided that the Vajpayee government must go.

The first inkling the Congress party got that she was serious about bringing down the government, was when she met G.K. Moopanar of the Tamil Maanila Congress (TMC). At that time, the conventional wisdom was that if the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the TMC were somehow won over, the government would lose the vote of confidence. Without that, defeat for the Congress was certain.

When Moopanar went to meet Sonia Gandhi, she was straightforward and clear. "You've been away long enough.

is threatening to turn into one.

Janata Dal has six MPs. Of that, two — former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda and to some extent former information minister Jaipal Reddy — are for support to the Congress. The other four MPs — former PM I.K. Gujral (who was dislodged from prime ministership because of the Congress), Bihar MP Ram Vilas Paswan, and two MPs from Karnataka, which is going to face a straight fight against the Congress in the Assembly elections — are not in favour of supporting the Congress.

The Janata Dal will not give the letter to the President of India, promising support to Sonia Gandhi. This brings down the strength of the Congress alliance by six.

Chances of Janata Dal $\frac{2}{10}$
crossing the floor

DRAVIDA MUNNETRA KAZHAGAM

- The Congress is sanguine in the hope that the DMK cannot support the BJP government and will therefore support it. But the DMK remembers all



Kalpnath Rai

too clearly and bitterly the manner in which the Congress used the Jain Commission Report and the DMK's role in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination, to bring the I.K. Gujral government down.

In the circumstances, it is not possible for the DMK to support a Congress government (with others supporting from the outside).

Chances of DMK crossing $\frac{4}{10}$
the floor

AKALI DAL

- P.S. Chandumajra is the only MP bearing allegiance to the Tohra group in the Akali Dal who is likely to leave the Akali Dal for other pastures.

However, much more than Badal, it is Tohra who is anti-Congress. So, if the government is to be headed by the Congress, Chandumajra will simply not be able to support it.

It is another matter if the new government is headed by somebody from the Third Front, like say, Mulayam Singh Yadav, and supported from the outside by the Congress. Then Chandumajra could consider supporting the government. But even then, he risks attracting the provisions of the anti-defection law — the Akali Dal has eight MPs and needs at least three to constitute a split.

Chances of Akali Dal $\frac{2}{10}$
crossing the floor



Tohra



Nitish Kumar



I.K. Gujral



Jaipal Reddy

I want you to come back," she told Moopanar. She informed him that from now on, he would run affairs of the Congress in Tamil Nadu — the procedural details could be worked out later. "You should now return. Whatever happened was a mistake on the part of Narasimha Rao," she told Moopanar, who promptly returned and decided, despite differences within the TMC, that they would vote against the BJP. The only concession that Moopanar made to his colleagues was that if the ADMK joined the Congress government, the TMC would vote against corruption.

In Parliament, well past midnight on the night of 17 April, P. Chidambaram explained what his party's stand was: we will open the door and throw out communalism; but that doesn't mean we will let corruption walk in through the same door, he said.

So the TMC was in the bag. Now it only remained to get the BSP across.

It so happened that the BSP came across on its own. Here's how.

Having had the government thrust upon her, what will Sonia Gandhi do now? It is all a bit of a mess. Earlier, Congress minions could have handled nitty-gritty issues like bludgeoning secular allies for their support. Now, Sonia Gandhi has had to dirty her hands

To suggest, as some Congress leaders have done, that Sonia Gandhi arranged the 'defection' of BSP leader Mayawati after meeting her, is unadulterated bilge. The reasons for the BSP's defections were uniquely Dalit, and the manner in which it was done is an interesting story.

More than a week before the vote of confidence, BSP and former Congress MP Arif Mohammad Khan had prevailed upon Mayawati to vote for the Congress. There was never any doubt on this score. Khan had explained to Mayawati that the Harijan vote was already with

Where does the BJP go now?

The party's future strategy

The BJP feels that it is soon going to be time for another mid-term election. Senior leaders are giving shape to the strategy to be adopted by the party over the next few months. The party is not abandoning either an attempt to stage a comeback in government or function as part of the Opposition in Parliament. The broad contours of the party's strategy are already visible:

1. L. K. Advani is tipped to play a greater role in party affairs than he has done in the past year. As Kishabbhai Thakre's term as party president is



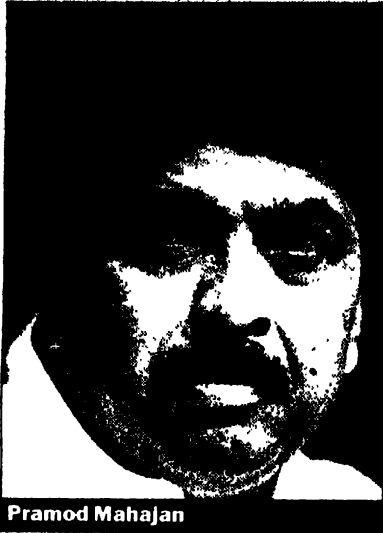
Rangarajan Kumaramangalam

technically to end only in May 2000, Advani is unlikely to assume any office. But a senior party leader said: "Advaniji does not need any position to draw authority." Sardar Patel's re-entry into the organisational frame is expected to result in major structural changes, revive enthusiasm of an alienated cadre and reduce factionalism. The move would also indicate Vajpayee's undisputed position as parliamentary leader. Organisational polls due in some states shortly are to be put on hold.

2. Senior leaders who had been pushed out of the party structure in the past year are to be brought back. This would include names like Prasad Mahajan who's reportedly under medical treatment for the past few months.



Kushabhau Thakre



Pramod Mahajan



Govindacharya

He will be given the charge he held before the 1998 polls: forging alliances with other parties. General secretary Venkaiah Naidu, who is in charge of Karnataka and Andhra (both states go to polls in November) may lose Karnataka to Ananth Kumar. Rangarajan Kumaramangalam is likely to be asked to strengthen the campaign machinery, a skill that the leadership accepts he has.

3. Role of the existing office-bearers will be more sharply defined. Among general secretaries, Sumitra Mahajan and Sangh Priya Gautam have had little to do. Narendra Modi has been reverted to smaller north Indian states though his capabilities in Gujarat have been tested time and again. Similarly, with Advani back at the helm of affairs, Govindacharya can no longer be restricted to Rajasthan and the training programme.

4. Once the uncertain political scenario settles a bit, the party machinery will launch a mass contact campaign. Public meetings, agitations, and tours of national leaders are to be planned soon. The strategy is not to hit a high note immediately but to build it in a manner for the campaign to nose-dive into the election campaign.

5. The campaign points of the party are to include the following: the manner of defeat of confidence vote, the achievements of the government and highlights of the Budget.

6. The BJP's alliance with existing partners is to be cemented by showing greater understanding of alliance partners' sentiments. This would mean reining in state units in Bihar, West Bengal, Maharashtra and other states. Precise nature of ties with TDP, DMK and Chautala's party has to be worked out. Special care will be taken in Tamil Nadu to integrate DMK with the breakaway groups of AIADMK's alliance partners.

Interviewed: Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Narendra Modi, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Narendra Modi



Sonia with Jayalalitha

the BSP. If the party was seen as the one bringing down a BJP government, the Muslim vote would be added on to it.

Mayawati understood the logic. But Khan told her that the BSP was getting a chance to make the BJP sweat — it should teach the Manuwadis a lesson they would never forget in their life.

Blissfully oblivious to the internal discussion in the party, Pramod Mahajan went to meet Khan who assured him that the party would abstain — after all, how could the BSP be part of any plan which had the Samajwadi leader Mulayam Singh Yadav as its protagonist? Mahajan was reassured, but the BJP continued to work on the BSP MPs. Then Mayawati made her famous speech in the Lok Sabha emphasising that if the BJP was *naagnath*, the Congress was *sacupnath*. So, for the Bahujan Samaj, there wasn't much to choose from. It was six of one and half-a-dozen of the other.

But the BJP told itself that so long as the BSP abstained in the voting — that is, didn't vote against the BJP — that was safe. Little did it know that this very complacency was what the BSP was hoping to lull the BJP into.

The BSP leadership was clear that no one should get any hint of their plan to show the BJP its place. So the MPs were kept in the dark about its plans — till the lobbies were cleared for voting, the BSP MPs were under the impression that they had to abstain in the vote.

On the morning of the voting (17 April), Kanshi Ram called the Prime Minister and reiterated his party's intention of abstaining in the vote to help the BJP. "The real help would have been if you had voted in our favour," said the PM. "We have our own compulsions," said Kanshi Ram. "We can't do that. But we will abstain." Then Mayawati came on the line and told the PM that if he nee-

Home truths

Repentance, BJP-style

The BJP appears to be surprisingly ready to accept that it "made mistakes" in the past 13 months in office.

Senior organisational leaders are unwilling to put that on record, but they are candid about it in private conversations.

■ Senior leaders concede that undue importance had been placed on "seniority within the party". Instead of making loyalty to the party and its ideology the main criterion while selecting ministers, better administrators should have been chosen.

■ A virtual parallel power centre was created by placing Advani in North Block. A section of the BJP feels that Advani could have been "spared the ordeal and instead been appointed chairman of the coordination committee with Cabinet status".

■ The BJP-led coalition's biggest failure was its inability to ensure regular interaction between alliance partners. This reveals that the BJP was not ready for the coalition culture.

■ There was the failure to "effectively screen" the antecedents of neo-converts before appointing them to sensitive positions. Mohan Guruswamy is cited as a case in point.

BJP leaders feel that there are several other issues on which they erred. Introspection will take a while as the "present crisis has to be resolved first". But senior leaders are clear that the "home truths will have to be faced sooner or later". As one leader says: "We can now get away by saying 'To err is human.' But, if we are not self-critical, then others will say 'Those who do not learn from history are doomed to relive it.'"

Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay/New Delhi

Why did Sonia suddenly decide that the BJP



A.B. Vajpayee with L.K. Advani

ded any more reassurance, he could see for himself — the BSP MPs wouldn't even go to the House during the voting.

This call was part of the elaborate illusion that the BSP was creating

Soon after this, the PM got another call — this time from a Congress leader who had stumbled on the BSP plan. "Do you know that the BSP is going to vote against you?" the leader asked. "But Kanshi Ram has just spoken to me..." said the PM, confused. "I have definite information," said the Congress leader. The PM, who hasn't been a politician for more than 50 years for nothing, understood instantly. "*Congress sey mil gayee*?" he asked, half to himself. The Congress leader lowered the telephone pityingly.

When the MPs walked into the House, a long wrangle went on about Girdhar Gamang's right to vote. So everyone missed the parallel drama on in the sidelines. Mayawati told Arif Mohammad Khan to inform the MPs

how they were to vote. Then she made her biggest mistake. She turned to Arif Mohammad and asked, loudly: "*Arif, lal button hi dabana hai na?*"

T.R. Balu of the DMK was sitting next to her. He is one of the few Tamil Nadu MPs who understands Hindi. "*Lal button?*" he asked turning to Mayawati. "Oh I was just asking Arif which button to press," said Mayawati to cover up. But Balu understood the game instantly. He ran across to where Rangarajan Kumaramangalam was sitting and told him the BSP was voting against the BJP.

It took Kumaramangalam only two seconds to comprehend what was going on. By now, Mayawati had walked out of the House into the lobbies. Kumaramangalam ran to Arif Mohammad Khan and asked: "What are you doing?" "Doing?" said Khan. "How do you mean?" Meanwhile Kumaramangalam dashed to the PM's room and informed both Advani and Vajpayee that they should reconcile themselves to being stabbed in the back by the BSP.

government had to go?



Ottavio Quattrocchi



Madhavsingh Solanki



Rajiv Gandhi

■ For the past one year, BJP politicians were mystified by Vajpayee's apparent cordiality towards Sonia... There had been no political attack on Sonia Gandhi by the BJP

■ However, Advani ran out of patience and Sonia was informed that the home ministry had prepared a notification about its intention to prosecute some of those involved in the Bofors case

■ Those to be prosecuted were Madhavsingh Solanki, Ottavio Quattrocchi — and then, the most damning disclosure: the government was also planning to prosecute assassinated PM Rajiv Gandhi

■ According to these sources, Vajpayee had first held back, and then given clearance to the prosecution

Meanwhile, Mayawati found former Haryana chief minister Bhajan Lal in the lobby and was talking to him. Arif Mohammad Khan went out to look for her and, to his profound consternation, found her deep in conversation with Bhajan Lal. "Behenji, aap kya kar rahi hain? Aapko kisi ney dekh liya to sab kahenge aapki Congress sey deal ho gayi hai," he scolded her. Khan led Mayawati back to her seat. "But we have to let someone in the Congress know what we're doing," hissed Mayawati. At this point, Khan went across and brought Sharad Pawar to Mayawati.

"Aapne apna intezaam kar liya hai?" asked Mayawati. Sharad Pawar was as direct. "Hamara seedha arithmetic hai," he replied. If you abstain, the government wins by four votes. If you vote for us, we win by two votes.

Meanwhile, Kumaramangalam dashed back into the House as fast as his short legs would carry him. "Aap shaam ko oath ley lejiye, UP chief minister-ship ki," he told Mayawati. "Ab hum

nahin lenge. Bahut der ho chuki," she said

That's how the BJP lost its government

Having had the government thrust upon her, what will Sonia Gandhi do now?

It is all a bit of a mess. Earlier, Congress minions could have handled nitty-gritty issues like bludgeoning secular allies for their support. Now, Sonia Gandhi has had to dirty her hands. She now has, perforce, to be involved in breaking parties, engineering defections, the whole ugly caboodle. The painstakingly-nurtured image of not being bullied by short-term politics, the careful distance from sordid petty politics... Sonia Gandhi is now part of that scene whether she likes it or not.

She cannot form a coalition with corrupt and venal elements like Mulayam Singh Yadav and Jayalalitha in the government; and she can't do without them either. The Janata Party is refusing

to give her support (it was, after all, her insistence on getting the DMK out, which brought down the I.K. Gujral government). The Congress cannot support a Third Front leader like Mulayam Singh as PM and stay outside. It is tainted by association.

It is a perilous path. Congress MPs are gloomy about handling Parliament — the BJP in government may have been inept, but they make for a frighteningly formidable Opposition. Combine the oratorical skills of George Fernandes, Nitish Kumar, Atal Behari Vajpayee, L.K. Advani, Sushma Swaraj, Pramod Mahajan and others, and you have a problem on your hands. Vajpayee learnt his job as Prime Minister on the job but that was after nearly 50 years in parliamentary life. Sonia Gandhi doesn't have one year in Parliament.

So how will she manage the Third Force? No one knows. All that the Congress MPs can say is that this is a hollow victory. The BJP says: better them, than us. •

Rajiv Shukla/New Delhi

Left in the middle

CPI(M) general secretary Harkishen Singh Surjeet acts as a catalyst to bring the government down

If anyone deserves to be awarded the 'politician of the April crisis,' the only candidate would be CPI(M) general secretary Harkishen Singh Surjeet. He deserves this award not only for his role in bringing down the BJP government, but also for the sacrifices he made for the nation: he sacrificed his principles!

He tried to engineer splits in various parties and thereby encouraged the politics of *Aya Ram Gaya Ram* — a practice usually hated and shunned by the communists. He sacrificed the reservations that communists generally have about 'corrupt' politicians. In fact, the Left threw out Laloo Prasad Yadav from the United Front once he was charge-sheeted. But now, the CPI(M) has accepted Jayalalitha. All for the sake of the nation.

And of course, to leave out Jyoti Basu's name would be to deny his histo-

ric role in this drama. He was not in the front row, but away in Calcutta. However, he was Surjeet's main sponsor. Only a few weeks ago, the party had advised the two senior leaders not to keep reiterating that they would bring down the BJP-led government. The advice stopped Basu's public utterances but had the reverse effect on Surjeet.

According to party insiders, Surjeet confided only in Basu, keeping the rest of the party in the dark. "But what else could he do?" asked a central committee member from West Bengal pointing out that "Surjeet and Basu have always maintained a good rapport with the Congress, whereas the majority was always against the Congress. So, their only option was to take the party into confidence only when the whole drama reached a flashpoint".

And that is exactly what happened. No one in the party was aware of what

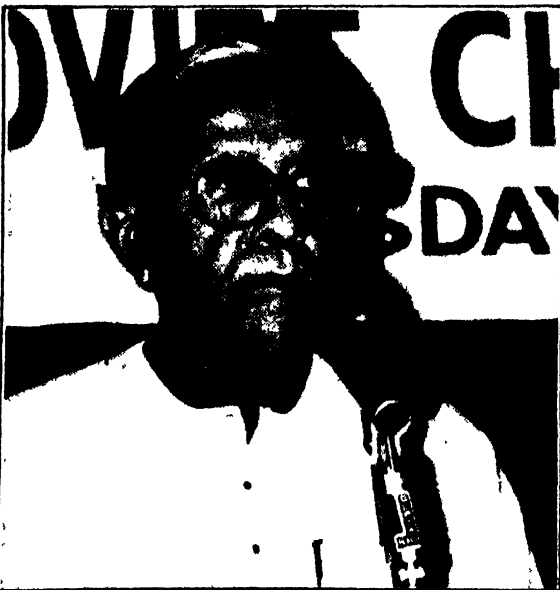


Surjeet was up to since the middle of March. In fact, Surjeet enjoyed total immunity from public glare as he announced that he was unwell and was taking some time off to rest.

In reality, he was working overtime. So much so that from 'Mr Surjeet' he began to be known as 'Papaji' (elder brother in Punjabi) in political circles. Basu, however, shrewdly kept a low profile and is still known as 'Jyoti babu'. And for the record, it must be mentioned that Basu was not as politically active as his comrade from Punjab.

It was 16 March. The BJP government had just completed one year in office and looked as if the coalition would be stable for sometime.

It was then that Surjeet met Sonia Gandhi at her residence. After the meeting, the CPI(M) general secretary warned all the communist MPs that the Congress would soon be bringing a no-confidence motion against the government. No one is quite clear as to what transpired between the two, except for the fact that Surjeet is believed to have assured Sonia that a no-confidence motion would get



To leave out Jyoti Basu's name would be to deny his historic role in this drama. Though he was not in the front row, he was Surjeet's main sponsor

RUPINDER SHARMA



Surjeet and Jayalalitha: for the nation's sake

the support of as many as 280 MPs.

According to him, while BJP allies such as the Akali Dal, Samata Party and Biju Janata Dal would split, others such as the National Conference and the Indian National Lok Dal would cross over. At this point, there was no indication from Jayalalitha that she would withdraw support from the government.

However, Sonia did not respond to Surjeet's overtures. There was no sign of the Congress moving a no-confidence motion and Surjeet's first attempt to bring the government down was in vain.

This is when Subramanian Swamy stepped into the picture. On two previous occasions, Jayalalitha had indicated to Sonia that she was ready to pull out, but she got no response from the Congress president. However, this time around, Surjeet and Swamy joined hands. A blueprint was prepared to lure the Congress chief. A tea party was organised and Sonia was invited.

Surjeet knew that Sonia was keen to push the BJP-led government into a corner and was keen to avenge Bofors with

Vishnu Bhagwat. Keeping this and her anti-DMK and anti-LTTE politics in mind, Jayalalitha also picked up the Bhagwat issue. According to sources, Surjeet worked overtime to make Swamy's tea party a success. He allowed the communists to attend and advised the Yadav duo to be present as well.

Everything worked according to the 'grand plan'. The communists were not exposed, but Sonia made a mistake by attending the party. After this, there was no looking back. Surjeet advised Sonia to tell Jayalalitha to withdraw support on 14 April, a day before Parliament reopened.

"Why should the Opposition bring in a no-confidence motion? Why shouldn't the government bring a confidence motion?" Surjeet thundered. It was imperative to Surjeet's calculations that the President ask the government to seek a vote of confidence. And this is exactly what happened.

However, even after the tea party, Sonia gave the Surjeet-Swamy duo no indication of her plans. It was then that

Surjeet activated his friends in the Congress. Sonia was told that after the tea party she had no choice but to topple the government. She then met Jayalalitha once more. And on the eve of the trust vote, Sonia let loose her brigade and asked them to work towards bringing this government down. On his own, however, Surjeet failed to split any party.

Within the party, Prakash Karat, better known as the general secretary designate, was a mere onlooker. CPI's general secretary A.B. Bardhan was furious when Surjeet stated that "if a party thinks an individual is more dangerous than communalism, then there is something seriously wrong with that individual". After this, there was no stopping the DMK from joining hands with the BJP.

So, the Third Front has more or less collapsed with the DMK's departure. This may be of some concern to Karat who wants to fight both the BJP and the Congress. But Basu and Surjeet are both visibly relieved. At last they have got rid of the 'barbaric' government at the Centre.

But why did the two CPI(M) leaders play this game? The CPI(M) does not want to form a government. It would merely provide outside support to an alternative arrangement. So, what was the urgency in bringing the BJP coalition down?

As a central committee member put it, "We want to play the role of a catalyst. A BJP government at the Centre meant the end of our journey. Now we are back at the centre stage." While there is nothing new in the hunger for such a role, there is an added attraction this time: their influence over the Congress. Which is something they have been wanting for a very long time.

However, there are sections in both the CPI and CPI(M) that are sore at the developments. "The longer the BJP remained in power, the more damaged would be its image," said a senior MP. Adding, "Both the Congress and the Third Front needed time to consolidate. Now, only the BJP will reap the harvest."

But followers of the Surjeet-Basu school of thought feel that the government was becoming stable and had actually started performing. So, it was the right time to strike. And yes, they did not mind that some foul play was involved. After all, nothing succeeds like success. •

Diptendra Ray Chaudhuri/New Delhi

The chosen one

For Arjun Singh, the wheel has turned full circle

When Delhi was avidly discussing the fate of the sacked Chief of Naval Staff, Vishnu Bhagwat, Arjun Singh was comfortably ensconced in his ancestral home at Churhat, listening to another Bhagwat Purana. Organised ostensibly in the memory of his mother, the Bhagwat *havan* was an example of politics *a la* Arjun Singh.

The ceremony was held at a stadium in Churhat, attended by Congressmen from far and near. Chief minister Digvijay Singh spent four hours at the *havan* on its concluding day. Kamal Nath, Suresh Pachauri, ministers in the Digvijay Singh Cabinet, the Speaker of the MP Assembly, Shrinivas Tewari, and a bevy of MLAs were present at the 'religious' function. Everyone was there for the politics of it.

Apparently, the heavy dose of religion (Singh was in Churhat from 29 March to 4 April, the longest stint in his village since 1995) paid off. When he returned to Delhi, Singh found the gods were smiling on him. Sonia Gandhi announced that she had appointed him party spokesman, the only one authorised to speak on her behalf. It was the day Singh had been waiting for, for several years.

The last few years have not been kind to Arjun Singh. Although he started his career at 27 as an MLA in 1957, there were many occasions when he was felled by blows from which opponents thought he would never recover. At one stage, he was so badly caught up in corruption cases (the Churhat lottery case, the Kerwa Dam house case and later, the *havalas* scandal) that his supporters and friends wrote him off.

More misfortune was to follow. P.V. Narasimha Rao threw him out of

the Congress and Singh formed his own party, hoping Sonia Gandhi would bless this venture. She didn't, crying off from involvement in factional politics. When Arjun Singh contested from Satna in 1996 as a Tiwari Congress candidate, he not only lost the election but nearly lost his deposit as well.

In Bhopal, things were not going well either. It was Arjun Singh who made Digvijay Singh the chief minister of Madhya Pradesh. But his *shishya* proved to be more talented than the guru. If Arjun was the first chief minister to complete a five-year term (the average term of a chief minister in Madhya Pradesh has been 26 months), Digvijay is the second one. But Digvijay was soon to overtake Arjun, who at one stage considered toppling his own protegee from the chief ministership.

When Narasimha Rao was thrown out of the leadership of the Congress and Sitaram Kesri took over, it was hard for Arjun Singh's supporters to decide whether this was good or bad for him.

"*Agar Kesriji mujh se AICC office mein jhadu lagane ko bhi kahen to mein tayyar hoon* (I'm ready to sweep the floor in the AICC office if Kesriji asks me to do so)," Singh once said when he was awaiting re-entry into the Congress. He was allowed to return.

This was 1997. Now he was so grateful and penitent that upon coming home to the Congress, he surprised everyone by visiting his arch-rival Shyama Charan Shukla in Bhopal, a man whose existence he would not recognise earlier. During another trip, he blasted Digvijay Singh's regime in Madhya Pradesh. All this was an exercise to build up pressure on Digvijay.

Digvijay had learnt from the master.

He took pre-emptive measures. V.C. Shukla hit out at Arjun Singh. "Those who damaged the party by deserting it have no right to criticise it now," said Shukla.

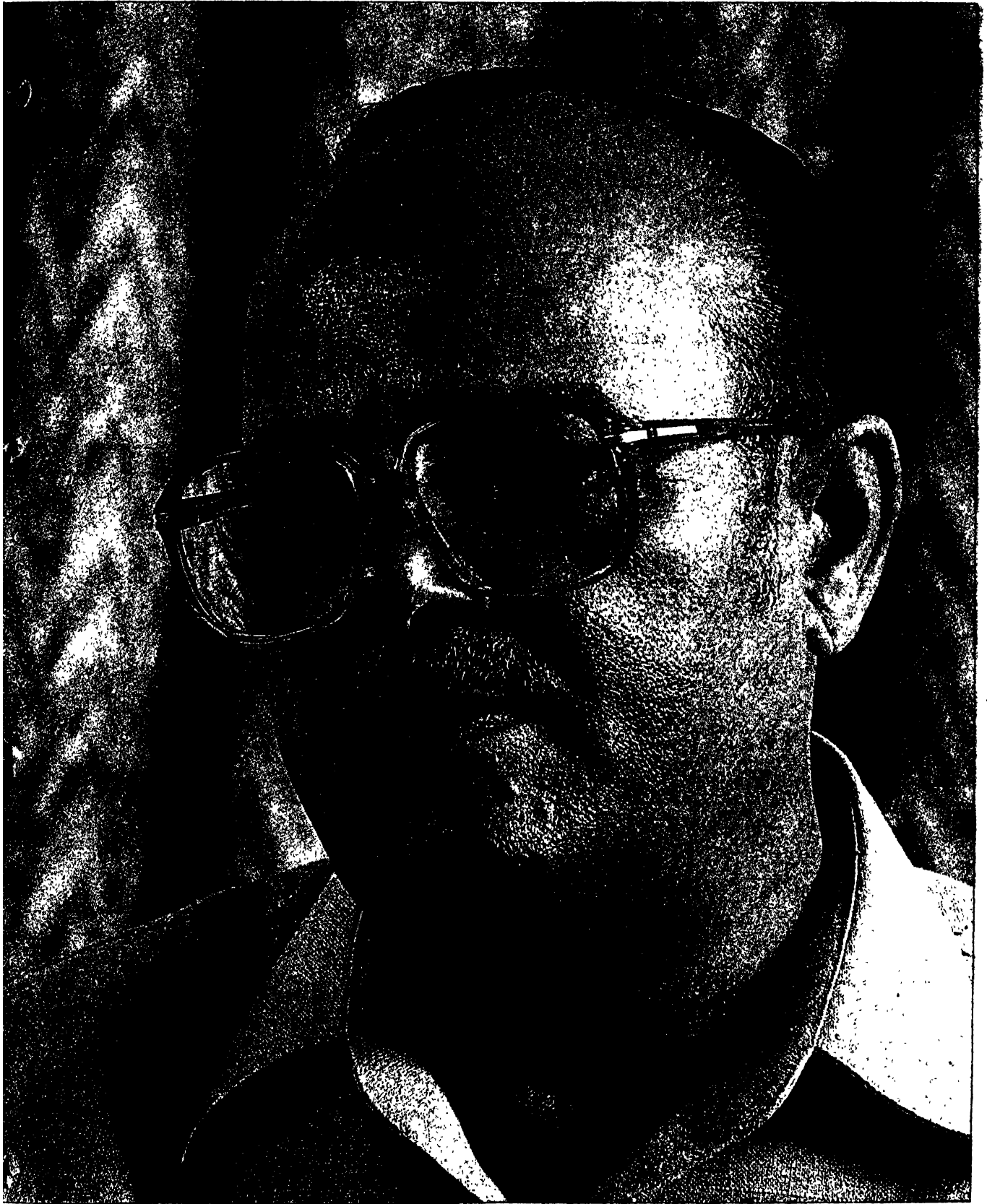
To this Arjun replied via an address to the Congress legislature party, "I have been wounded by people during the last two years [when he was not in the Congress] from the back, from the front, from the sides... But I have nothing in my heart, no regrets and no political desires." He also said, responding to Shukla's charge, "I can be stopped by two means: one, ask Kesriji to expel me from the Congress again and two, eliminate me physically — an expertise which has already been developed in Madhya Pradesh."

After all this rather abject rhetoric, it was generally believed that Singh had recovered lost ground. But this was not the case. In the 1998 general elections, too scared to go back to Satna which had rejected him, and worried that he might not get a safe constituency because Digvijay had packed the state with forces inimical to him, Arjun decided to move to Hoshangabad. He rejected Damoh, Khajuraho and some others as 'unsafe'.

As all the seven Assembly seats were with the Congress, Arjun Singh thought Hoshangabad was in the bag. It wasn't. He lost by a margin of over 75,000 votes. Later, he tried to get a Rajya Sabha seat but no one was prepared to concede one. Once a mass leader, he was now a man without a constituency.

However, things have come full circle. Now Arjun Singh is the chosen one, the man whom everyone loves to hate — but one who has Sonia Gandhi's confidence. His imprimatur is clear in the carefully drafted statements, the sophisticated fielding of questions. Things are not so good for Digvijay in the state — he has annoyed many Congress leaders by dropping them in his second term as chief minister. Many are Arjun's men.

Arjun's son has got elected as an MLA. Things are looking up for him politically. He's hoping to keep the gods smiling. In Arjun Singh's case, the Bhagwat Purana is the first good thing that's happened to him after a long time: He's determined to keep it that way. •

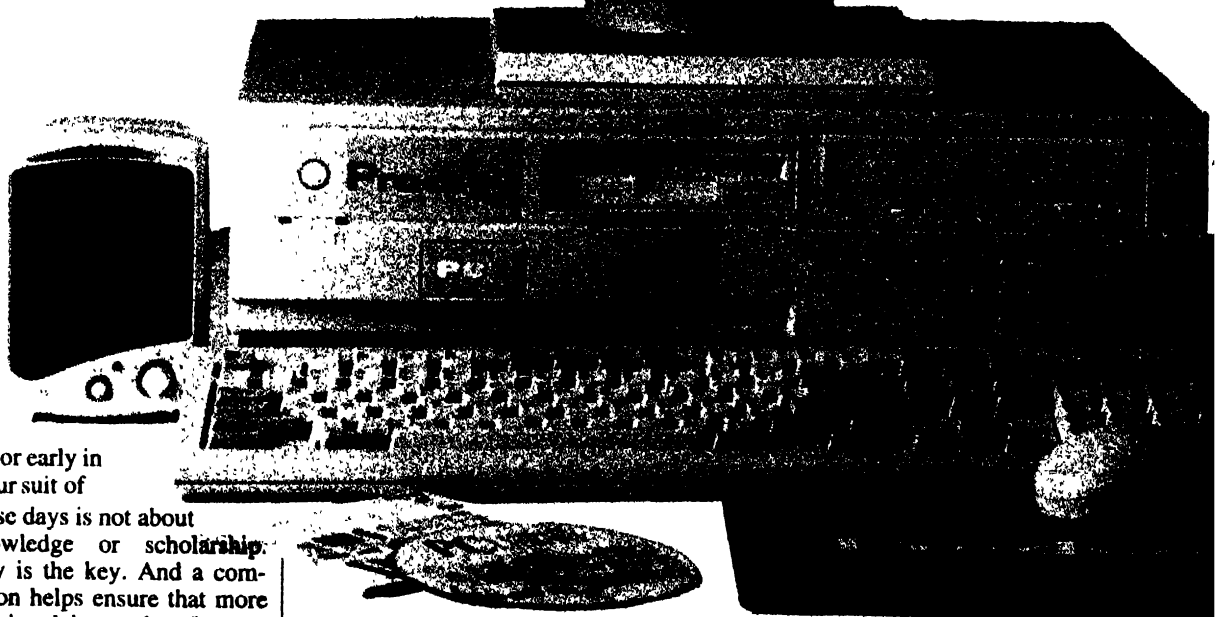


ABORT, RETR

The road to the information highway can be bumpy

Paradigms have changed. If you asked the generation Exers to free associate, net wouldn't relate to fish but to the world wide web; Java would not be the motorcycle that ruled Indian roads, but the hottest new programming language. And they are more likely to associate oracle with Oracle Systems than with the occult.

To say the least, computers are on almost everyone's minds these days. Governments want to computerise, companies want to ERP-ise, even old men want to play their Solitaire on their PCs. But it's the 2000s generation that's the most IT-struck. Says Dr N.R. Shetty, who retired as Bangalore University



vice-chancellor early in April, "The pursuit of education these days is not about gaining knowledge or scholarship. Employability is the key. And a computer education helps ensure that more than a conventional degree does."

Official estimates have added to that belief. According to projections made by the Prime Minister's IT Task Force, the country will need over one million software development professionals by

the year 2008 if it wants to meet its software export target of US\$ 50 billion. "Right now we have a workforce of only 2.3 lakh software professionals," says Dewang Mehta, President of Nasscom

and spokesman for the Task Force.

Where are these professionals going to come from? "Certainly not from the conventional education system of Bachelors of Science where computers

Y, FAIL...

is *not* the major subject," says Dr Shetty. "Such a large workforce has to necessarily come from the non-formal education system."

But what kind of education?

The answer to that can make the difference between a fat pay cheque and a jump in the Hooghly. Yet, it's a question not many students ask themselves before diving into the morass of software training institutes that are coming up all over the country like mushrooms after a rain.

There are courses and courses (*see box*). And behind the we-have-the-best-software-minds-in-the-world headlines, lies a seamier underbelly. Of those who



didn't make it. The might-have-beens. The hopefuls and the hopeful dead. Literally. Last September, a 22-year-old man's body was fished out from Husain Sagar in Hyderabad. He had committed suicide. Reason: after spending lakhs on sundry computer courses, he had applied for but was denied a visa for the US. He

couldn't find a decent job anywhere else.

The Indian education system is hardly known for being the best in the world. Indian students may be. That's the crucial difference.

Especially when it comes to computer education — an area where what you learn is what you do. You cannot fool your employers for long. If you say you can write a programme, they won't go by your degree. They'll ask you to write it. In six months, or three months, or now. If you can't, you can go. So apart from the hype of the successes, how much do these colleges and institutes really deliver on their promises?

Not much, according to V. Ramakrishna, managing director of a software development company called Reliance Systems. "Even after four years of engineering education, I find most students way below the desired mark," he says. "They aren't even strong on basics."

Professor H.N. Mahabala, an educa-

tionist and presently an adviser to Infosys, is another who is dismayed at the quality of computer education in the country today. "IT education is facing major problems. The first being good faculty. The salary structure in the formal sector, such as in engineering colleges, is so low that they do not have good teachers."

College-based IT education also faces another problem. In a fast-changing field like this, keeping up with rapid developments is absolutely essential. But while autonomous bodies like the IITs and private enterprises like NIIT and Aptech have managed this, colleges and universities are bound down by rules and regulations.

Things are not much better in the informal sector — meaning private institutions — where teaching jobs are like plugholes. "Here the faculty turnover is so high that the joke within the industry is: the best student from the current course will be the instructor for the next course." Till he moves on.

Moreover, unlike formal education, these courses have no educational audit and no method by which to measure their success or efficacy — an impartial system of common examinations, for instance, that will at least give the student a true picture of where he stands. "How does one ascertain the quality of training? How do companies monitor the courses? How well is the subject being taught?" asks Dr Mahabala. "The danger is most of these authorised courses might end up being providers of syllabus and rubber stamp certificates."

Infotech companies are still struggling with a solution to the problem. Tata-IBM, for instance, initially took to education to meet its in-house needs. Though most of the people it hired when it set up shop in India were professionals with previous experience, they still needed 'brushing up'.

"Later, however, when the company expanded and started hiring freshers, we found a significant gap between what the students had learnt at college and what the company needed of them," says N.N. Khurana, IBM's general manager, Learning Services. "So the freshers were put through a 13-week (over 3 months) programme before being placed on the job."

Tata-IBM then took a serious look at things, talked to other software development houses and decided to set up its own training centres to develop softwa-

re programmers who could be hired easily. "The kind of software programmers that the country needed," as Khurana says.

But not every company can afford *that* kind of backward integration. So how do they manage? "They have organised themselves very well up to now — by begging, borrowing or stealing," says Mahabala, Infosys adviser. "But I'm afraid we will remain at the lowest level

motive is as simple — or as complex — as that. Being a good software programmer or even holding a good solid job at home are for backward guys. The forward ones just want to Get There.

But getting there is not quite so simple. "A computer course certificate will not land you in Alabama, warns K. Gopalakrishnan, senior manager, Learning Services, IBM. But his advice finds few takers and though half the applic-

ants fail IBM's rigorous entrance test, they keep coming back for a re-test. It's a syndrome placement officers recognise very well. Says Poornima Shenoy, who runs a successful IT placement company called Nexus in Bangalore, "Students have to realise that a degree and a computer course certificate will not find them either scholarships in the US or a job in Singapore. They might, at the most, land up as data entry people in the

CALL IN THE ARMY

Retired defence personnel can help to achieve greater computer literacy

At 13 schools in the coastal districts of Dakshina Kannada and Udupi in Karnataka, a different kind of education is going on. Most of the schools' teachers and students who had never before set eyes on a computer, are today busy networking with one another.

The schools are part of a pilot project being conducted by the National Task Force for IT. The aim is to achieve 'total computer literacy' by 2008 AD. In June the project is expected to be launched in other schools across the country. To be connected to one another through a LAN (Local Area Network) or an Internet, the schools will be increasingly interacting with one another.

This IT literacy drive has rather grandly been called Operation Knowledge. Among its objectives are — introduction of computers in all educational institutes, even at the secondary school level; making IT compulsory in all degree courses and finally, making it essential for eligibility to government jobs even as all the older employees are retrained.

But where are the teachers going to come from? Nasscom's Dewang Mehta has a rather unique answer — call in the army. "There are over 70,000 IT-savvy people who are retired from the army. Most of these people have gone back to their hometowns. We will tie up with about 10,000 of them and employ them in villages and small towns." Which sounds fine as long as *teaching* IT is not compulsory for drawing pensions.



of the IT business if this is the way to go about training professionals for the future "

It would be wrong, however, to paint IT institutions as seductive enticers waiting to fleece and fool innocent students. Some may be all of that and more. But at least half the onus must lie on the IT-chasers themselves.

Most students making a beeline for these courses are what is called — unclear on the concept. Vanitha Raghavan, executive counsellor at an IBM ACE centre in Coimbatore, says: "Students come to us and say — 'I want to go to America. What should I do?'" The

Last year, nearly 35 chartered accountants who had done some computer course or the other were sent back from the US when it was found they did not have the necessary skills

Gulf. That's it."

It's a difficult message to get across. And if the young can be excused for being young, what can one say of the old? The middle-aged, anyway. Says Aarleen Ahluwalia, a marketing executive with a leading institute, "I once had a police officer in his late 30s who came in to do a course only because jobs in the IT industry pay a lot more than the government job does."

Says another counsellor, "There are any number of people who have been settled in their jobs for almost a decade but now want to quit and go in for a change of career. When I ask them, 'Won't you

mind building a new career from scratch all over again?", they say they are willing to take the risk."

To make a mid-career switch needs courage. And ability. For those who manage the jump successfully — it's good going. But for everyone who does, there are at least 30 others who land in ruination. Last year, nearly 35 chartered accountants who had done some com-



"We will tie up with 10,000 retired IT-savvy army people and employ them in villages and small towns"

DEWANG MEHTA

puter course or the other and Got There, were sent back from the US when it was found that they might have had the certificates but did not have skills for the jobs they were hired to do.

There have been successes, though. And great ones too. But if sweet dreams are made of these, nightmares may follow. Because the idea is very simple: being IT-literate can turn a good painter into a great one. But it *cannot* turn a painter into a programmer. Don't reach for the keyboard, if what you're good at is the brush. There's no money at the end of *that* road. •

Gauri Lankesh/Bangalore

GROWING DAILY

Take your pick from the mushrooming training institutes

Institutes offering IT education fall under three different categories. To start with, there are top of the line institutes like the IITs and premier engineering colleges. The IIITs (India Institutes of Information Technology — also called Triple ITs) are expected to be almost on a par with the IITs. Two have recently opened for admissions in Hyderabad and Bhuvaneshwar. A string of them will be coming up across the country over the next two years. Second in line are universities and institutes that provide MCA (Masters in Computer Application) courses. And finally, there are the private computer training institutes.

"Till as little as two years ago, computer knowledge was something only engineers had and PCs were for rich people," says Reginald L. Sharaon, a manager with a medium-sized Madras-based IT education company called Brainware. "Today, it is not just for the lower-middle class, but even children of cooks and vegetable vendors want to learn about computers. It's like someone who has a cycle wanting to drive a car."

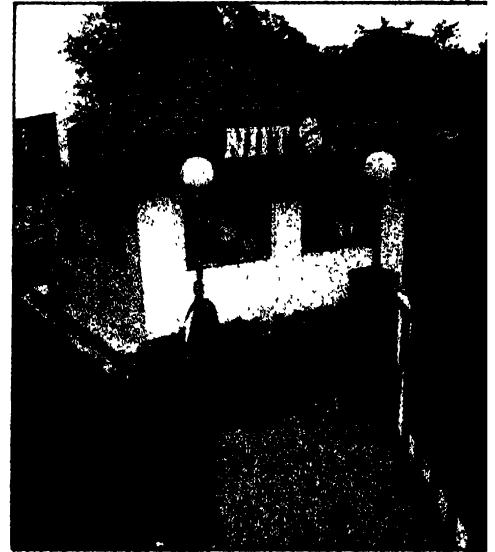
A look at the growth of the two major IT education firms in the country — NIIT and Aptech — reflects the rush for computer courses. NIIT, which gets

more than half its revenue from the IT education business, has grown from a mere Rs 15-crore company in 1989 to a Rs 656-crore edifice. Its 600 centres have more than one lakh students on their rolls.

As for Aptech, till four years ago, it had a disappointingly flat growth rate. Things, however, changed in 1995 and the firm grew from a mere 64 centres in the south to more than 450. Today there are over 11,000 Aptech centres dotting the country. "And we are still growing," says K. Ramesh, executive vice-president of Aptech. "Today all I need to do is identify a location and I will have people waiting for our franchise to be set up."

Later this month, Aptech and Bangalore University will be launching a collaborative exercise in providing a BCA (Bachelor in Computer Applications) degree through a distant education programme. The university will be responsible for the syllabus and will conduct exams while Aptech will provide computer time to the students at its centres and conduct contact programmes.

According to Pramod Khera, executive director of Aptech, the 3-year degree course will be initially open to students from Karnataka and Goa, but will be expanded later. Though the fee is hefty by university standards — at Rs 5,000 per semester it works out to Rs 30,000 for the course — Khera is confident there will be enough number of people wanting to enrol



Alliance Air has little regard for crew morale and passenger safety

When the Indian Airlines decided to float its own subsidiary, Alliance Air, the ostensible purpose was to start an airline that in future would remain unencumbered by labour problems — bane of the airline industry — and also afford functional autonomy. Three years after it was created, Alliance Air symbolises everything that could go wrong with an aviation company.

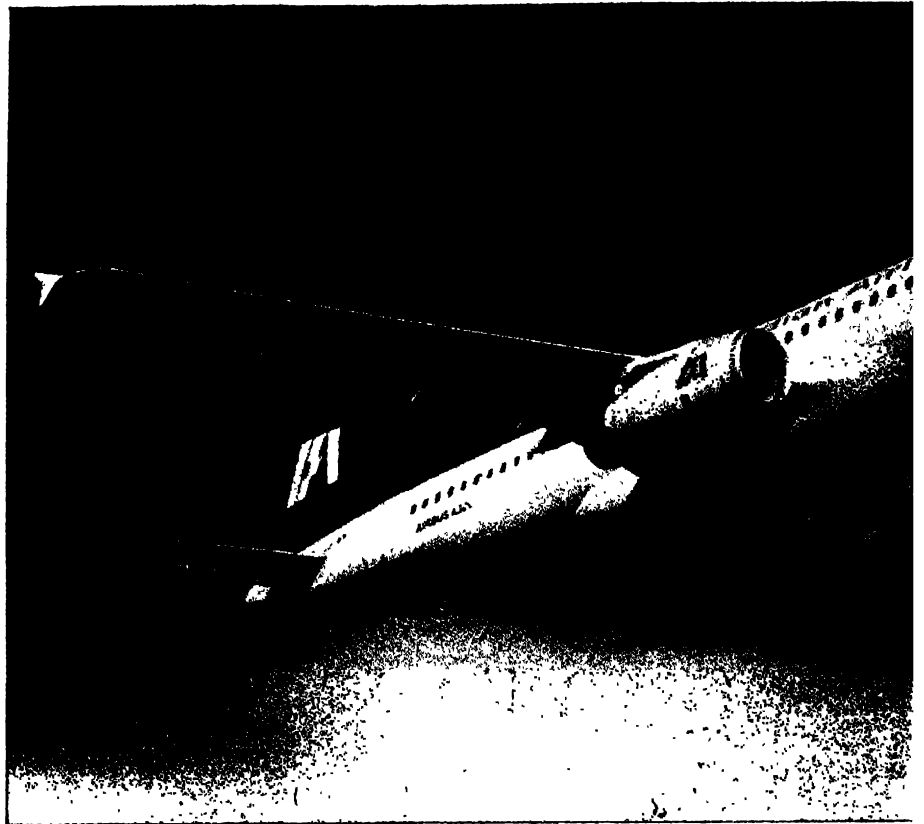
Its aircraft are so old and creaky that they give the impression that they will fall off the sky. The management, too, is no different. Headed by executive director Shakti Loomba, AA has become the parking place for the old and the infirm. Using prevention of trade union activities as an excuse, the top management of the company has employed aviation professionals who had superannuated from other companies in key operational areas. With little stake in the future of the company, these pliant employees are doing irreparable harm to the cause of flight safety.

Sample this. On 27 November, 1998, a passenger on flight CD-215 from Calcutta to Tezpur complained to the directorate general of civil aviation (DGCA), "I was one of the last persons to board the aeroplane and observed one of the pilots getting into the plane along with me. When he was crossing me, I could smell that he was drunk. On observing him, I was sure that the pilot was not in a normal state. He was wearing four stripes."

Investigations by the DGCA — mandated to monitor flight safety — revealed that the commander of the aircraft did not undergo a medical check-up either before or after completion of the flight. Refusal to take a medical test before the flight is considered to be blasphemous. Those who have displayed such temerity have been grounded for life. DGCA rules are categorical that a crew member testing positive to alcohol will be considered a ground for immediate termination. But Alliance displayed different standards.

Insiders claimed that the "captain kept dozing off repeatedly and was behaving abnormally. Flight was conducted

Thrown to



When Indian Airlines decided to float its own subsidiary, Alliance Air, the purpose was to start an airline that would remain unencumbered by labour problems and also afford functional autonomy

dangerously and even radio calls were missed". Thanks to the alertness of the co-pilot and the fact that most of the aircraft are flown on autopilot, the clueless passengers did not feel the drunken captain's stupor.

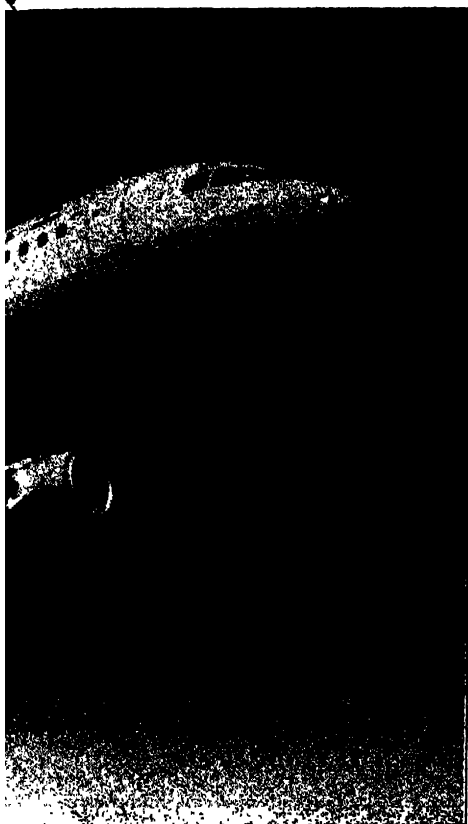
The Tezpur incident was investigated perfunctorily by director air safety of the DGCA. Its dangerous implications on the safety of the aircraft were glossed over. After being grounded for 19 days, the captain was reinstated and is back to flying. There are allegations that the erring captain got his job back for a consideration.

More incidents of the management turning a Nelson's eye to drunken pilots flying archaic Boeing aircraft lend credence to the charges of venality. According to AA sources, there have been four reported incidents of drunken flying in the last few months.

In 1997, a pilot found flying under the influence of liquor was grounded for three months. There are allegations that the doctor who conducted the breathalyser test was pressurised to write to the management that his equipment was faulty.

A charge against the management is that it has been adopting different yardsticks when it comes to countenancing

the winds



the various acts of commission or omission of the flying staff.

- A senior pilot flew through severe hail and thunderstorm. The aircraft was badly damaged and the crew and passengers had a narrow escape. No action was taken. *Au contraire*, he was elevated as a flying instructor.
- Another pilot who flew through similar weather conditions was grounded for six months.
- A senior captain broke a barrier at airforce station, Jodhpur. No action was taken. Another pilot who broke landing lights at Indore was grounded for one month.
- A pilot had a landing incident at Silchar. His licence was suspended. Another pilot who rejected take-off after attaining critical speed and after the aircraft's tail had hit the ground was allowed to go scot-free.

In yet another shocking incident, a senior flight instructor threw caution to the winds and took some of his friends in the cockpit even when the flight VT EGM to the Andamans was overbooked. The senior pilot changed the category of the passengers from adults into infants. His two friends were given manual boarding cards to avoid detection.

Loomba, a deputy general manager from Indian Airlines, has shown considerable felicity in keeping competition at bay. Even though there are scores of pilots in the IA who are his seniors, he has kept them away from the AA with help from the ministry of civil aviation.

Perhaps the most scandalous is the manner in which a senior pilot Capt. Mal-

are doing to this young airline. At least two officials, who are more than 65 years of age, head two of the most significant operations. Captain S.K. Bhatia looks after flight safety and Surinder Pal Singh looks after roster and crew scheduling. Bhatia oversees training requirements of AA pilots at the simulator. Bhatia gets paid for the number of hours that are logged at the simulator. Charges have been levelled by some of the flying staff that their names were put in even when they had not trained at the simulator.

The disquiet in the AA has begun to spill over. Not too long back, some of the family members of the flying crew complained to the management about the "indiscretions" of some pilots and air hostesses. The provocation was a roaring affair between a pilot and an air hostess. Things got so serious that the management was compelled to issue a circular titled 'Dipping your pen in company ink'. The circular was categorical that the employees would be terminated



Silchar airport: another landing incident

hotra's attempt to join Alliance was short-circuited. Malhotra was one of the executive pilots sent to Hyderabad for training for A-300. After eight weeks of training, he was supposed to join the AA. But before he could complete his training, he was pulled out from Hyderabad. Now he finds his career in jeopardy. If he had joined AA, Malhotra would have been the senior-most official in the AA.

Retired people of doubtful efficiency are running three-fourths of the engineering department's operations. The AA's delay record is an eloquent testimony to what these superannuated professionals

if they exhibit conduct prejudicial to the interest or reputation of the company.

In spite of the bold noises, the executive director promoted the air hostess raising eyebrows in aviation circles. In fact, some of the air hostesses have levelled serious charges against the company's top management. An air hostess in her resignation letter to the civil aviation secretary writes ruefully, "Due to humiliation and disrespect among my colleagues, I was compelled to leave the job of Alliance Air purely on self-respect because no respectful lady ever could tolerate vulgar remarks, humiliation." •

Sanjay Kapoor/New Delhi

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Sagar Muthappa and Sandeep S. Rao-1st in Group N
Castrol Rallye d' Endurance '98*
V. R. Naren Kumar and M. K. Chander-1st in Group A
Sagar Muthappa and Sandeep S. Rao-1st in Group N



COCHIN
16th Popular Rally '98*
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Sagar Muthappa and Sandeep S. Rao-1st in Group N



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THE BUBBLE HAS BURST

Sluggish growth rates. Dwindling ad spend. Can the Indian advertising industry cope?

- *The Indian ad industry, two years ago, was growing at a rate of 35-40 per cent.*
- *The industry today is growing at a rate of around 12-14 per cent.*

These figures can make anyone put his thinking cap on. What has gone wrong in the Rs 10,000-crore ad industry? And what is it supposed to do to come out of this so-called Great Indian Crisis?

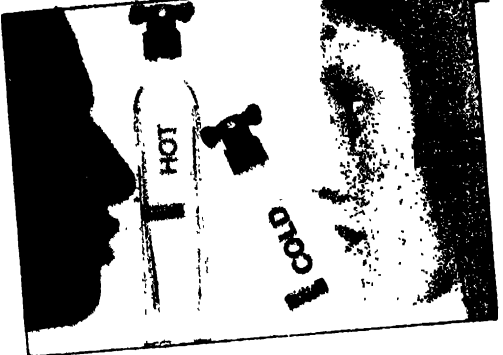
It is time to chalk out new strategies, pundits within the industry would tell you. Not surprising, for all the manoeuvres that seemed time-tested and foolproof once, have taken a beating. Ad blitzes, concept selling and lavish brand building exercises are passe. India is no longer the El Dorado of the international marketing fraternity. Political uncertainty has played havoc with

the multinationals' planned expenditure. As Navroze Dhondy, CEO, TBWA Anthem puts it, "The 250-million-strong Indian middle class has belied the hopes of market analysts. Habits and attitudes have changed, but not as dramatically as the merchants of change had thought they would."

Call it misreading. Call it false hope. For, it was too much to expect that pizzas could pass for "*firang*" *paranthas* all due to some spectacular ad campaign. For the manufacturer (read TNCs) as well as the mad ad man, it was time to say: Welcome Reality.

And, that wasn't good news.

Some observers affirm that recession has spared no sector of the economy, and the ad industry isn't an exception. But Sunil Gupta, general manager, HTA, doesn't agree. "When the base grows, to achieve the same rates of growth as before, business has to grow proportionately. The size of the industry has grown.



FMCG (fast moving consumer goods) companies, can't afford to reduce ad spend since the demand is constantly growing at an impressive rate.

Hence, achieving growth rates to the tune of 35 per cent to 40 per cent, as was the case earlier, is no more feasible. Even by global standards, our growth rates are quite realistic," he says. Adds Indranil Gupta, executive director, RK Swamy/BBDO: "There was a fair amount of media inflation which had contributed to the growth rate of 35 per cent to 40 per cent during 1994-95. This is a reality check. It was too much of a bubble. It seems to have reduced, if not burst."

There has been 15 per cent to 25 per cent rise in media costs, depending on whether a client opts for print or television. As a consequence, the ad budgets of some clients have shrunk. Among the companies to have slashed their ad spends are Titan, Philips India, Siemens and Wipro.

Yet, is the entire industry doomed? Not really, though the pinch felt by middle-sized and small agencies is hurting them. The fact that the bigger agencies hold FMCG (fast moving consumer goods) accounts is just one of the reasons. Despite a recessive economy, the market has witnessed numerous product launches. Experts hold that it is during a slowdown that budgets must not be slashed as the share of voice of a

particular brand must be maintained. It has been observed that a company that maintains its share of voice in the media emerges from the crisis with a better consumer base.

If a company is able to withstand a crisis, that means it is financially sound. "The reason is because, as a system, they have invested more in their systems and values and their ways of working which are far more tested and proven over a period of time," explains Rajesh Rai, senior vice-president, Everest.

The medium-sized agencies are largely owner-driven. Their systems are based on the idiosyncracies of one or two individuals who take all the decisions. Hence, they seldom develop the kind of resilience that can help them tide over a crisis. However, it wouldn't be correct to assume that the Marxian notion of big capitalists (read agencies) swallowing up smaller ones will be enacted here. There exist clients who offer their accounts to the smaller agencies with the belief that they will get a better value for money and attention despite their restricted pockets. But it is definitely the bigger agencies that enjoy the clientele of big ad spenders such as HLL, ITC, Procter and Gamble and Pepsi. As the product manager of Procter and Gamble (Pantene), Rahul

Call it false hope. For, it was too much to expect that pizzas could pass for "fining" paranthas.



Navroze Dhondy

"The 250-million-strong Indian middle class has belied the hopes of market analysts. Habits and attitudes have changed, but not as dramatically "



Sunil Gupta

"The size of the industry has grown. Hence, achieving growth rates to the tune of 35 per cent to 40 per cent is no more feasible. Even by global standards, our growth rates are quite realistic"



Indranil Gupta

"There was a fair amount of media inflation which had contributed to the growth rate of 35 per cent to 40 per cent during 1994-95. It was too much of a bubble. It seems to have reduced "

Kadyal puts it, "As FMCG companies, we can't afford to reduce our ad spend since the demand for our kind of products is constantly growing at an impressive rate." Pepsi's vice-president (corporate communication), Deepak Jolly, explains, "We may cut down on administrative costs but not our ad spend. The competitive considerations are greater than pecuniary ones."

It is not that the big companies are cruising through the tumultuous tide. Their overheads are high, and boom estimates and investments have led to extravagant expenses on oversized manpower. To survive, agencies have to cut costs and find alternative sources of revenue. Downsizing is a common trend nowadays. Fanciful designations and mind-boggling increments are being replaced by retrenchments and recruitment freeze. Agencies are renegotiating packages.

"The concept of variable pay is being included as part of employees' salary negotiations, so there is small, minimum fixed income and a variable portion depending on the person's and the agency's performance," says Samit Sinha, general manager,

Bates Clarion. Other measures to cut costs are shifting premises to areas with lower rentals and investing in technology to reduce costs.

A reflection of the industry's desperation is mirrored in instances of compromises on the conventional 15 per cent commission norm that was hitherto considered sacrosanct. None of the accredited agencies are allowed to deviate from this norm according to the AAAI guidelines. Only under exceptional circumstances can one accept a service fee. O&M's reported deal with Onida is supposed to be based on the service fee agreement. Gopinath Menon, media planner, TBWA Anthem, says: "Whole pricing structure of advertising agency is undergoing a change depending on how much money you want to make on an account. So the 15 per cent deal is not sacrosanct." Agencies are more eager to pick up accounts for a fee, as it covers the minimum expenditure and they can rely on it as fixed income. The assumption is that it makes the agencies more accountable. Monitoring agency remuneration is a difficult task as agency success is difficult to gauge. While clients are tight-lipped over this issue, Sameer Verma, Lintas, admits, "The 15 per cent commission norm is holding here, but it is under pressure."

all due to some spectacular ad campaign

IS CREATIVITY BEING VICTIMISED?

- Thematic advertising has taken the backseat as approach to advertising becomes increasingly tactical. This contrasts with times not long ago when there was a vision for the brand that was being advertised

- Schemes, promos and incentives have replaced that approach. Promotional activities are more



visible. Nowadays, all you have are sale ads, price-off ads and scheme ads

- "Doing commercials for products other than FMCG are rare nowadays. Earlier, you would do two-three campaigns in two-three years for an account. Now you manage just one and happily repeat for the next two-three years," Rajeev Rai, Everest

That's how far they will go to acknowledging that agencies are working on special rates. In the West, this norm is defunct. Large volumes of business are agreed on rates as low as nine per cent to ten per cent. But the absence of the concept of time sheets in India makes estimation of input costs difficult as the time spent on an account cannot be ascertained. With higher billing the fee doesn't increase.

The most significant development of these trying times has been the demand for integrated communication packages by clients. Hence, the agencies now provide value additions such as direct marketing, public relations, merchandising, and at times, facilities such as interactive media.

Rajeev Karwal, vice-president (marketing), LG Electronics, admits, "Value additions are always welcome." Rajesh Rai, Everest, explains, "If an account demands a direct marketing exercise, we have to provide them the services before they go to somebody else." Integrated marketing and communication strategy is more effective than mass media advertising. What is needed is investment into market-building activities. Sameer Verma, general manager, Lintas, adds, "What clients are looking for is a one-stop shop, basically."

The clients have become more aggressive, demanding and accountable at this time of slowdown. To retain accounts, agencies have no option but to cater to their demands. Deepak Jolly says, "We give our agency the right to execute their plans. But we do try to get the best and the cheapest media deal."

But often what a client demands is not

award-winning commercials that fail to translate into sales. Rajeev Karwal, LG, justifies: "The commercial must describe the product attributes in a comprehensible manner. Sometimes, creativity tends to compromise on that consideration." Has creativity been victimised? Thematic advertising has taken the backseat as approach to advertising becomes increasingly tactical. This contrasts with the times not long ago when there was a vision for the brand that was being advertised. Schemes, promos and incentives have replaced that approach. Promotional activities are more visible, clients assert. Nowadays, all you have are sale ads, price-off ads and scheme ads.

Ad professionals assert that the agencies will definitely become more productive and efficient thanks to downsizing. What was hitherto missing was the hunger for business success. You need to monitor your progress every three months. Earlier it used to be annual. The agency today is more of a marketing equal rather than an institution churning out ads. That is the reality agencies will have to realise. The threat of media buying shops, not accredited to AAAI, that are picking up prestigious clients has forced agencies to evaluate what more can they offer. Another trend is the fact that the big agencies are getting richer with accounts of companies, the ad spends of which are growing. Besides, the smaller ones cannot afford to offer discounts as their margins are thin.

It is a game of survival of the fittest. As Sunil Gupta, HTA, puts it, "The fittest may not be the largest. But what is definite is that the largest will be the fittest."

That is an apt summary. ●

Devdatta Das/New Delhi



OM PURI

Now, it can be told: the story of how Om Puri almost never made it to the Pune Film Institute. Fresh from his triumphs at Delhi's National School of Drama (NSD), Puri arrived at Pune to try and enter the hallowed portals of the film institute. But while his grades were excellent, and his performance compelling, the jury still had doubts about admitting him to the acting course. Reason: they felt he didn't have a cinematic face!

But in the end, Girish Karnad, the then director of the institute, prevailed and Puri was admitted to the course. And the rest, as they say, is history.

One of the abiding mysteries of our times is how Rinke Khanna, younger daughter of Rajesh Khanna and Dimple Kapadia, ever got to be a heroine. She's short, she's dumpy, and she's not particularly attractive. In fact, if she was the girl next door, you wouldn't give her a second look.

So, how come she's been signed on as a heroine in a Hindi film? Aha, there's where pedigree comes in. And when it comes to pedigree, you can't beat the Khanna-Kapadia tag — as Rinke has found out, in the best possible way.

Now that Somy Ali is well and truly out of the picture, Salman Khan is busy making up for lost time. When he isn't wooing Aishwarya Rai in style, he is cosying up to Karisma Kapoor at awards functions — and being rewarded with a kiss on the cheek for his efforts. And then, of course, there's always Neelam when he wants to paint the town red in salubrious company.

It would be fair to say that Khan isn't really crying his eyes out for Ali. So, if she's hoping that distance will make Salman's heart grow fonder of her, she'd better think again — and quick!

KARISMA KAPOOR



REKHA

Raveena Tandon has finally got over her Akshay Kumar fixation. Anyone who had any doubts on this score had only to see her hugging and kissing Rekha at a recent film function. Yes, the same Rekha at whom Raveena used to spit fire, apparently because Akshay had had a little fling with her.

But now that Akshay is out of the picture, the two of them act like the best of friends.

Just one question: how would Raveena act if Rekha now began cosying up to Sunny Deol? •

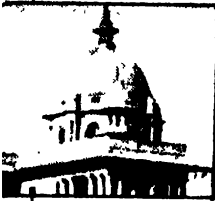


RAVEENA TANDON



Size does matter

India is too big to be ignored



The collapse of the Vajpayee government, by a wafer-thin majority of a single vote, has aroused conflicting emotions in the country. Since my concern at present is purely with the fields of foreign affairs and defence, I am duty-bound to record that discontinuity has come at a very difficult time and that too in the midst of the kind of

uncertainty that India hasn't witnessed ever before.

For, even if Atal Behari Vajpayee and his colleagues would have won, they would have done so with only one or two votes gifted by slippery politicians like Om Prakash Chautala and others of his ilk. Both stability and anything like effective governance would have been impossible under those circumstances. But then it is only fair to recognise that stability or governance will be hard to achieve under whatever alternative ruling dispensation is rigged up. A minority Congress government, headed in all probability by Sonia Gandhi, and supported by a motley crowd of parties and groups, will almost always be subjected to pressures, often illegitimate, from the likes of the two Yadavs and even the two Communist parties, to say nothing of the redoubtable and mercurial Jayalalitha. A Congress-led coalition, in which the worthies mentioned in the preceding lines are ministers, is vastly more frightening. Yet another "Third Front" government, backed by the Congress from "outside" would be farcical and fatally flawed.

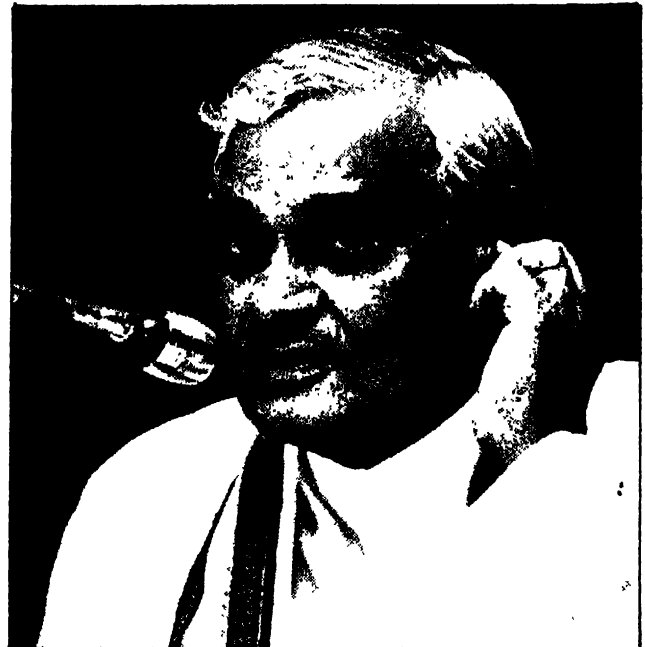
No country in the grip of political uncertainty, with its inevitable impact on the economy, is ever taken seriously by the world at large. This ought to be a matter of concern. For, India just cannot opt out of world affairs or allow itself to be ignored.

Fortunately, there are two saving graces in the otherwise depressing situation. First, even an uncertain and shaky India is too big and potentially too important to be ignored completely for too long. Secondly, there has always been a continuity in basic foreign and security policies of this country. There is no reason to believe that any government that succeeds the outgoing one will backtrack from either Vajpayee's nuclear and missile policies or his initiative of building up an understanding with Pakistan and engaging in serious nuclear discussions with the United States.

In any balance sheet of Atalji's 13 months in power, his bold decision to conduct the Shakti series of nuclear tests in May 1998 must be written in big and flattering letters. Previous governments, especially that of Narasimha Rao, had both the duty and opportunity to exercise the nuclear option. But they chickened out under foreign pressure.

All honour to Vajpayee for operationalising this option. But sadly, he contributed his own share to making Pokhran II a subject of controversy and contention instead of a focus for national consensus. The Congress and other Opposition parties did make national security a football of partisan politics. But then, the responsibility of the man in the driving seat is much the greater.

No lessons seem to have been learnt from this state of



Atal Behari Vajpayee: bold initiatives

affairs, as the test-firing of Agni-II missile amply underscores. Why was this missile not fired on the scheduled date of 4 March? By the time the missile test was conducted, the majority of the Vajpayee government had been called into question. Partisan passions had risen so high that Sharad Pawar, a former defence minister, allowed himself to make the fatuous remark that the test-firing of Agni-II had started an "arms race" in south Asia. This is motivated Western propaganda. If many Indians, besides Pawar, have swallowed this nonsense, it is because the Vajpayee government, like its Congress predecessors, has never tried to educate the public opinion.

Indians need to be told that without Agni-II and other missiles, there can be no minimum, credible nuclear deterrent. The Lahore Declaration, the fruit of Vajpayee's bus diplomacy, itself envisages missile testing by both India and Pakistan.

As I have reported in an earlier column, Americans were worried for quite some time that the Vajpayee government might fall before the India-US nuclear dialogue could be concluded. They had therefore taken care to meet Sonia Gandhi every time Strobe Talbott came to Delhi to talk to Jaswant Singh. Let them know that the onus for making formal negotiations with her government fruitful is on them.

There is no doubt that our Pakistani friends would have liked to do business with Vajpayee, especially after the atmosphere created by his visit to Lahore. But they have to respect the working of the Indian democratic process. And they can be sure that fundamental national objectives do not change with the change of government. •

CREATIVITY ■ HUMILITY ■ RECOGNITION: OUR CELEBS DON'T DISAPPOINT, FOLKS

Attention art-aficionados, music lovers, model watchers and all artistically-sensitive people: it's time to smile again, because creative people are back to their creative ways. And, if not creating anything new, then getting recognised for their contribution. Profiling some symbols of our national pride

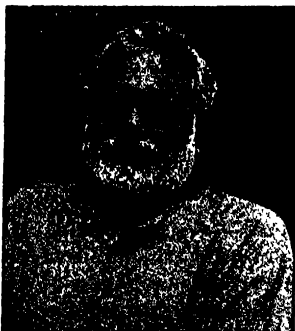
MANJIT BAWA

Bohemian painter who took to Sufism after the 1984 riots. He is back after a long gap with his collection *Bhav Bhaav Bhavya*. Source of inspiration: animals and humans (more of the former). The works also reveal the Sufi effect on him



MANU PAREKH

Painter who's also making a comeback of sorts. Latest work: *Ritual Oblations*. Source of inspiration: celestial. It



happened one fine day. Parekh was worshipping Goddess Kali in a temple when a wave of *bhakti* swept over him. The impact was visual and stayed with him. It now comes out on his canvases

DALER MEHNDI

Hyper-frenetic singer. Apparently, the taint of lucre hasn't touched him yet. Daler still lives in what most consider a downmarket DDA colony in Delhi. Favourite form of relaxation: lying on his charpoy and sipping his pet buffalo's milk. Latest buzz is that Coke's newest mascot is tipped to act in a Punjabi movie loosely based on his life. Casualty: that element of surprise...?



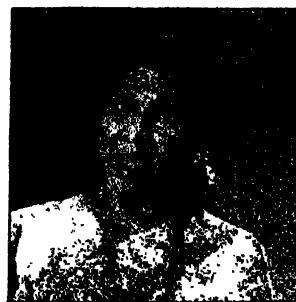
ASHA BHONSLE

So what, big sister is more famous and sought after, she doesn't have a day named after her. Asha Bhonsle has. Recently, Democratic Congressman Gary L. Ackerman — who's also co-chairman of the Congressional Caucus on India and Indian-Americans — issued a proclamation declaring **10 April** as "Asha Bhonsle Day" for the entire Indian-American community to recognise her as an "Impeccable cultural ambassador promoting better US-India relations". On that day, Bhonsle had held a concert at Kennedy Centre for the benefit of a charitable hospital in India



MADHU SAPRE

Spunky lady. At Naomi Campbell's much-hyped fashion show in Bombay, Sapre literally snarled at the supermodel. Reason: Naomi was acting haughty. (Apparently, Naomi thinks nothing of Indian supermodels). Madhu's calmed down since and is thinking of doing what most celebs tend to do after a point: write semi-autobiographical stuff. They sell, anyway



TALKING TO MADHURI

On 11 April, The Club, in Juhu, was the scene of a quiet celebration announcing the canning of M.F. Husain's dream venture *Gaja Gamini* which stars his long-time muse Madhuri Dixit. A Q&A with the actress.

Q: What is *Gaja Gamini* all about?

A: A woman's journey through different eras and walks of life. It's multi-layered and symbolic. Essentially, an attempt to delve into the mystery called WOMAN.



Q: What's your role?

A: I play several characters. Shakuntala, Monica, who is an ordinary yet independent woman, and Sangita, the blind street-singer, among others.

Q: Which one did you enjoy performing the most?

A: All of them were interesting and challenging.

IF WE CAN, WHY NOT?

Do we like women entering the male-dominated world of Indian motor sport? Unfortunately, the options are limited. If we don't, it's time we got lost. In the first-ever women's car rally in Calcutta, organised by Goodyear India Ltd in association with Calcutta Motor Sports Club, 82 participants took off from the Eastern Command Sports Stadium on 11 April. The ominous message: male chauvinists, back off. Among the high-profile participants were actresses Rupa Ganguly and Pallavi Chatterjee and singer Indrani Sen. The youngest was also a head turner: 18-year-old Miss Calcutta Panchali Ray, while the winner was Nirupama Parekh. Flagging



Nirupama Parekh receiving her trophy from Rupa Ganguly who was also the chief-guest

off the 80-km navigational rally, E. Krishnaiah, sales and marketing director of Goodyear, said, "We should have brought the event to this city much earlier." Seeing the response, we agree.

Shakuntala demanded a little more effort and concentration. Maybe, because I have never played her before.

Q: How was it working with Husain?

A: Enjoyable. He's very dedicated, energetic and bouncing full of ideas...

Q: Any expectations from the film?

A: *Gaja Gamini* can't be slotted either in art or commercial categories. It's surrealistic. I hope people like watching the film as much as I have enjoyed acting in it.

Interviewed by
Kanjal Walia/Bombay



Cate Blanchett with her award

IT'S ONE-ALL NOW

Revenge is always sweet; sweeter when it involves two statuesque heroines. At the 12 April British Academy Awards in Islington, north London, the favourite revenge motif of Elizabethan drama had a glamorous 20th-century replay when Shekhar Kapur's Aussie heroine in *Elizabeth I*, Cate Blanchett, pipped rival and Oscar winner Gwyneth Paltrow to the best actress award. Paltrow, who had the crowds outside the Business Design Centre chanting 'Gwyneth, Gwyneth', went home empty-handed.



Elizabeth won five awards including Most Outstanding British Film of the Year. Unfortunately, film's love affair with 16th-century Shakespearean London doesn't necessarily stretch enough to include directors. Blanchett's afternoon of glory saw Kapur miss out, yet again, on what he had probably assumed would be his — the best director recognition. Salve for hurt feelings however came from his heroine. "I want to dedicate this award to Shekar Kapur," said Blanchett, though it was one of her team-mates who put it more poetically: "...the magician from the East — our director."



OM PURI

Now, it can be told: the story of how Om Puri almost never made it to the Pune Film Institute. Fresh from his triumphs at Delhi's National School of Drama (NSD), Puri arrived at Pune to try and enter the hallowed portals of the film institute. But while his grades were excellent, and his performance compelling, the jury still had doubts about admitting him to the acting course. Reason: they felt he didn't have a cinematic face!



KARISMA KAPOOR

But in the end, Girish Karnad, the then director of the institute, prevailed and Puri was admitted to the course. And the rest, as they say, is history.

One of the abiding mysteries of our times is how Rinke Khanna, younger daughter of Rajesh Khanna and Dimple Kapadia, ever got to be a heroine. She's short, she's dumpy, and she's not particularly attractive. In fact, if she was the girl next door, you wouldn't give her a second look.

So, how come she's been signed on as a heroine in a Hindi film? Aha, there's where pedigree comes in. And when it comes to pedigree, you can't beat the Khanna-Kapadia tag — as Rinke has found out, in the best possible way.

Now that Somy Ali is well and truly out of the picture, Salman Khan is busy making up for lost time. When he isn't wooing Aishwarya Rai in style, he is cosying up to Karisma Kapoor at awards functions — and being rewarded with a kiss on the cheek for his efforts. And then, of course, there's always Neelam when he wants to paint the town red in salubrious company.

It would be fair to say that Khan isn't really crying his eyes out for Ali. So, if she's hoping that distance will make Salman's heart grow fonder of her, she'd better think again — and quick!



REKHA



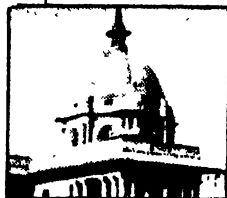
RAVEENA TANDON

Raveena Tandon has finally got over her Akshay Kumar fixation. Anyone who had any doubts on this score had only to see her hugging and kissing Rekha at a recent film function. Yes, the same Rekha at whom Raveena used to spit fire, apparently because Akshay had had a little fling with her. But now that Akshay is out of the picture, the two of them act like the best of friends.

Just one question: how would Raveena act if Rekha now began cosying up to Sunny Deol? •

Size does matter

India is too big to be ignored



The collapse of the Vajpayee government, by a wafer-thin majority of a single vote, has aroused conflicting emotions in the country. Since my concern at present is purely with the fields of foreign affairs and defence, I am duty-bound to record that discontinuity has come at a very difficult time and that too in the midst of the kind of

uncertainty that India hasn't witnessed ever before.

For, even if Atal Behari Vajpayee and his colleagues would have won, they would have done so with only one or two votes gifted by slippery politicians like Om Prakash Chautala and others of his ilk. Both stability and anything like effective governance would have been impossible under those circumstances. But then it is only fair to recognise that stability or governance will be hard to achieve under whatever alternative ruling dispensation is rigged up. A minority Congress government, headed in all probability by Sonia Gandhi, and supported by a motley crowd of parties and groups, will almost always be subjected to pressures, often illegitimate, from the likes of the two Yadavs and even the two Communist parties, to say nothing of the redoubtable and mercurial Jayalalitha. A Congress-led coalition, in which the worthies mentioned in the preceding lines are ministers, is vastly more frightening. Yet another "Third Front" government, backed by the Congress from "outside" would be farcical and fatally flawed.

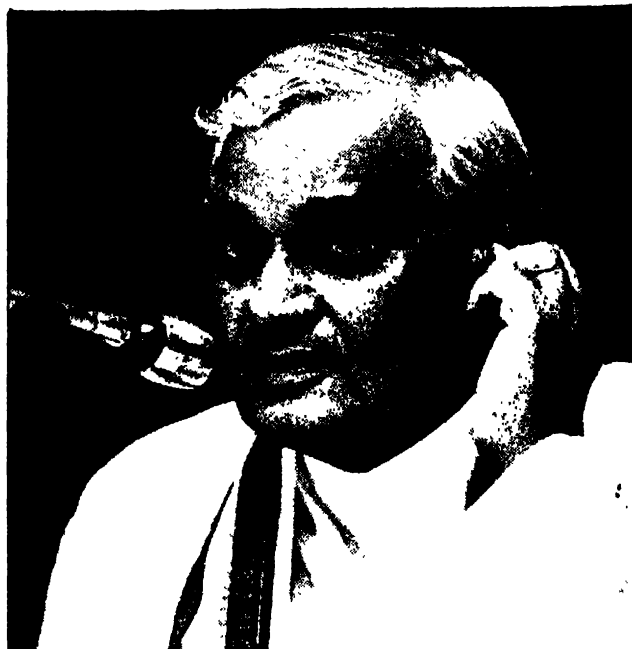
No country in the grip of political uncertainty, with its inevitable impact on the economy, is ever taken seriously by the world at large. This ought to be a matter of concern. For, India just cannot opt out of world affairs or allow itself to be ignored.

Fortunately, there are two saving graces in the otherwise depressing situation. First, even an uncertain and shaky India is too big and potentially too important to be ignored completely for too long. Secondly, there has always been a continuity in basic foreign and security policies of this country. There is no reason to believe that any government that succeeds the outgoing one will backtrack from either Vajpayee's nuclear and missile policies or his initiative of building up an understanding with Pakistan and engaging in serious nuclear discussions with the United States.

In any balance sheet of Atalji's 13 months in power, his bold decision to conduct the Shakti series of nuclear tests in May 1998 must be written in big and flattering letters. Previous governments, especially that of Narasimha Rao, had both the duty and opportunity to exercise the nuclear option. But they chickened out under foreign pressure.

All honour to Vajpayee for operationalising this option. But sadly, he contributed his own share to making Pokhran II a subject of controversy and contention instead of a focus for national consensus. The Congress and other Opposition parties did make national security a football of partisan politics. But then, the responsibility of the man in the driving seat is much the greater.

No lessons seem to have been learnt from this state of



Atal Behari Vajpayee: bold initiatives

affairs, as the test-firing of Agni-II missile amply underscores. Why was this missile not fired on the scheduled date of 4 March? By the time the missile test was conducted, the majority of the Vajpayee government had been called into question. Partisan passions had risen so high that Sharad Pawar, a former defence minister, allowed himself to make the fatuous remark that the test-firing of Agni-II had started an "arms race" in south Asia. This is motivated Western propaganda. If many Indians, besides Pawar, have swallowed this nonsense, it is because the Vajpayee government, like its Congress predecessors, has never tried to educate the public opinion.

Indians need to be told that without Agni-II and other missiles, there can be no minimum, credible nuclear deterrent. The Lahore Declaration, the fruit of Vajpayee's bus diplomacy, itself envisages missile testing by both India and Pakistan.

As I have reported in an earlier column, Americans were worried for quite some time that the Vajpayee government might fall before the India-US nuclear dialogue could be concluded. They had therefore taken care to meet Sonia Gandhi every time Strobe Talbott came to Delhi to talk to Jaswant Singh. Let them know that the onus for making formal negotiations with her government fruitful is on them.

There is no doubt that our Pakistani friends would have liked to do business with Vajpayee, especially after the atmosphere created by his visit to Lahore. But they have to respect the working of the Indian democratic process. And they can be sure that fundamental national objectives do not change with the change of government. •

The human angle

Indo-Pak initiatives have little effect on the ground reality in Kashmir

On 10 April, when army chief General V.P. Malik, during his four-day visit to Kashmir Valley, said that there was no change in the ground reality since the Lahore Declaration, his observation was neither startling nor sensational. He was merely admitting a fact. Two months after the Lahore event, ask anyone in Srinagar whether the much-hyped bus diplomacy has brought any change — however small — in the Kashmir scene, he will come out with a convincing "no" as an answer. From the man on the street to senior politicians, both pro- and anti-India, there is a uniform realisation that the 20-21 February Lahore talks between Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Nawaz Sharif have failed to make any impact on the Kashmir situation.

With guns spewing fire every now and then and killings taking place without any let up, Kashmir continues to bleed. If local newspaper reports are any indication, as many as 243 people including security personnel and militants have been killed in the state since the two Prime Ministers "vowed" in Lahore to shun belligerence and confrontational politics and to make peace in south Asia their mission. Sporadic exchange of fire has also been reported from the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and the Siachen Glacier.

This may sound incredible to someone swept away by the unprecedented hype over the bus diplomacy. But those who observed Kashmir keenly and did not lose sight of the bumps on the road between New Delhi and Lahore, knew it from the very beginning that it was not easy to make the journey from hatred to love so smooth. In fact, when the media — both in New Delhi and in Lahore —

was projecting the event as "path-breaking and a new beginning in Indo-Pak relations", a cynicism of sorts was palpable in Srinagar. Even phrases like "defining moment" or "ice-breaking", specially coined by Vajpayee and Nawaz Sharif, could not convince the Kashmiris that history was being made.

This apprehension is not unreasonable. The last 50 years of Indo-Pak history records more than 100 joint communique and agreements between the two



Sharif and Vajpayee at Wagah: friends in need

countries. And almost all aspects of a bilateral relationship — defence, Kashmir, release of prisoners of war and civilians, establishing communication links, trade and tourism — have been covered in these agreements. With all its contents and meanings, Lahore Declaration was no different.

"It could be best described as yet another addition to the already existing long list of mutual pacts," commented a senior Hurriyat Conference leader. A general refrain was that none of these earlier pacts and agreements could ease the threat of conflagration. The two countries, it was pointed out, have fought



File picture of Srinagar: anxiety in the air

The general impression in Srinagar is that the people of Kashmir have assumed the position of principal party in the dispute and without their active involvement, no durable solution can be worked out

three full-scale wars.

This time round, however, the media and the political leadership in New Delhi and Islamabad would have us believe that the road to peace in the sub-continent was smooth and that the history would not repeat itself. "Pragmatically speaking, any Indo-Pak summit can be a right and positive step towards peace in the region," says Shoukat Ahmad, a college teacher. "But, are Vajpayee and Nawaz Sharif ideal leaders to negotiate peace in the politically hostile and hypersensitive subcontinent," he asks.

There is no denying that religion has played a major role in the relationship between India and Pakistan. It is this factor which converts a cricket or a hockey match between the two countries into jihad or *dharm yudh*.

Political analysts believe that both

Vajpayee and Nawaz Sharif represented this wild stuff of politics. "It would be like looking for cinders inside water to expect them talk peace," said Abdul Rahman, a middle-rung bureaucrat. Despite his statesman-like qualities, one could not ignore the fact that Vajpayee was form a party which, along with its allies in the Sangh Parivar, was known for its extreme position on important issues including Kashmir, the stumbling block in Indo-Pak relations.

Nawaz Sharif, similarly, came to power in Islamabad by accusing Benazir Bhutto of selling out to India because of her cordial relationship with Rajiv Gandhi. Now that Sharif himself is going the Benazir way, there is no guarantee that his change of mind is genuine. "They just want to score a point at the international level," observed Maqbool Madni, a college student.

Kashmiris point to the air of hesitation and embarrassment which preceded the much-publicised "warm handshake" and "cordial embrace" of the two Prime Ministers at Wagah. They also feel that the Lahore Declaration did not spell out the agenda of friendship the two PMs were harping on. "The issues identified in the declaration, including Kashmir, have already been recognized in previous agreements," pointed out a research scholar in Kashmir University. Kashmiris feel that the entire bus-diplomacy show was enacted to please the international audience, especially the United States, who chalked out this agenda in the wake of last year's nuclear explosions by the two countries.

This, however, does not suggest that Indo-Pak relations should be allowed to drift. "Peace, after all, is imperative for prosperity," says Dr Tariq Butt. "It would be in the best interests of both the countries, where majority of the people live in extremely poor and inhuman conditions, to address basic areas of conflict and make peace with each other."

It would be naive to think that India returning Kashmir to Pakistan, or Pakistan giving away its part of Kashmir to India will end the face-off. "No government in India or Pakistan can afford to address Kashmir this way," points out a senior analyst. "The era of Rajas and Nawabs buying peace by gifting away or selling a piece of land is over."

Moreover, Kashmir is no longer a bilateral issue. Last ten years of armed movement with active participation of the Kashmiri people has added a new dimension to the already complex scenario. Local human rights activists and secessionist leaders claim that over 70,000 people have been killed in the past ten years. State officials put the figure at not more than 30,000.

Whatever be the fact, the general impression is that the people of Kashmir have assumed the position of principal party in the dispute and without their active involvement, no durable solution can be worked out. All Party Hurriyat Conference chairman Syed Ali Geelani recently pointed out that even if Pakistan withdrew its support, "we will continue with the movement till we achieve our goal".

In such a scenario, the Kashmir issue needs to be looked at from the human angle. It is time for a rethink. Otherwise, south Asia will be vulnerable to outside interference. •

Rashid Ahmad/Srinagar

Looking back, it seems Uttar Pradesh chief minister Kalyan Singh might have found it easy to face up to the havoc wreaked by the Chamoli earthquake. But the after-effects of the political tremors that brought the Atal Behari Vajpayee government down in New Delhi, may not be as easy to tackle for Kalyan Singh in Lucknow. Even before the heat generated by the crisis in the capital could subside, Kalyan Singh faces a new threat to his government. Now he not only has to tackle the dissenting voices in his *darbar*, he also faces the challenge of keeping his flock together.

Today, the Kalyan Singh government is threatened by allies like Loktantrik Congress party headed by Naresh Aggarwal and the breakaway BSP faction now under the banner of Jantantrik Bahujan Samaj Party (JBSP). And with BSP supremo Kanshi Ram declaring an all-out war against the Kalyan Singh government, a swift turn in political events at Lucknow was inevitable. "If it has happened in Delhi, can Lucknow be far behind?" — was the question being hotly debated in political circle.

With the BSP having played a decisive role in sealing the fate of the Vajpayee government, things are likely to move Mayawati's way in Lucknow too, political observers feel. But will Mayawati and Mulayam Singh Yadav sink their differences to oust their common foe — just as they did in New Delhi? Will she try to grab the CM's post in UP for the third time? Or, will Kalyan Singh pre-empt all such moves by going for the dissolution of the state Assembly and conduct a fresh elections under his own caretaker government?

But to do so, Kalyan must have a consensus in the House. After the fall of the Vajpayee government, Kalyan's detractors were holding a meeting in Lucknow to label the CM as the "sole culprit" for Mayawati's change of mind and BJP's fall. According to one MLC candidate, "Had it not been for Kalyan's insistence on sticking to the UP chief minister's chair, Mayawati would not have ditched Vajpayeeji in this manner." Another MLA and former minister strongly feels, "Kalyan Singh has no moral right to continue in office, he should step down gracefully."

There are many others who believe that the BJP's last-minute announcement to let Kalyan Singh continue as CM led Mayawati to change her mind.

The Heat



(FROM LEFT) A.B. VAJPAYEE, L.K. ADVANI, KANSHI RAM, MAYAWATI AND KALYAN SINGH

Had L.K. Advani not declared that there would be no change in the UP leadership, Mayawati would have extended or abstained from voting against the Vajpayee government in the Lok Sabha, they feel.

Kalyan's crisis has been further deepened by the political games that are being played at the Centre. In the changed scenario, both Mulayam and

Mayawati are using Lucknow as the prize for a quid pro quo deal between them. Already, Mulayam's Man Friday, Amar Singh has started pleading his "neta's" case. Apparently, Singh has met leaders of almost all smaller parties to garner support for Mulayam as the candidate for the top post at the Centre. Sources say, the AIADMK chief, Jayalalitha, has been assured of a clean chit in all her corruption cases if she

Is On

The fall of the BJP-led coalition at the Centre poses a new threat to UP chief minister Kalyan Singh



agrees to throw her weight behind Mulayam, who already has the support of CPI(M) general secretary Harkishen Singh Surjeet.

The deal is: Mulayam would give in to Mayawati's demand of UP chief ministership, provided he is assured of PM's post at the Centre. After all, he knows that such a golden chance may not be repeated once a stable Congress regime takes over the reins of governance after a mid-term poll. So sacrificing UP for the time being may not be all that expensive bargain for him.

divided. According to a senior Congressman, "There was no harm in such an arrangement, at least that will prove that we are not hankering after power." However, a younger Congress leader sees no logic in this. "Are we meant to be only installing someone here and someone there? Aren't we capable of having our own government," he said.

Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee (UPCC) chief Salman Khurshid, too, is not averse to the idea of cooperating with the Samajwadi Party. But, of course, he has made it clear that, "we will not get active in toppling the Kalyan Singh government, but in case it collapses on account of its inherent contradictions, then we will fulfil our responsibility and political obligations."

At the same time, Khurshid was going all out to restore order in his own house. Of late, he has indicated that the Congress was willing to take back all those into the fold who had left the party sometime back. For instance, Khurshid is trying to get back the Loktantrik Congress party, provided Naresh Aggarwal is left out of the formation. "We will have no objection against anyone except Naresh Aggarwal," he said.

But Naresh Aggarwal is hardly interested in going back to the Congress. And in order to pre-empt any move by the Congress to split his party, he has already started negotiating with Mulayam, despite reassuring Kalyan Singh of his party's absolute support.

There are many who believe that the BJP's last-minute announcement to let Kalyan Singh continue as CM led Mayawati to change her mind. Had Advani not declared that there would be no change in the UP leadership, Mayawati would have extended or abstained from voting against the Vajpayee government

But it is to be seen whether the Congress high command would agree to support a Mulayam-led coalition at the Centre and a Mayawati-led regime in Lucknow. Till date, the opinions are

Kalyan Singh is aware of this and he knows unless he can prevent such crossovers, his government will face serious threat from the Mulayam-Mayawati combine.

It is quite clear that a non-BJP government in Uttar Pradesh would not be possible without SP and BSP sharing a common platform. In the state Legislative Assembly, Mulayam has a strength of 107 members, while Mayawati's fragmented BSP has only 49 members.

It is a well-known fact that Mayawati had demanded Kalyan's dismissal as the price for bailing out the BJP-led coalition at the Centre. "I wanted to avenge my humiliation at the hands of the BJP, which had engineered a split in my party in the most unconstitutional and illegal manner," she said in Lok Sabha. Clearly, the BSP vice-chief had not forgiven Kalyan for masterminding the coup in October 1991 that had considerably weakened the BSP.

However, before the trust vote in Parliament, Vajpayee had agreed to respect Mayawati's demands. Highly placed sources in the BJP said Vajpayee was looking for an opportunity to axe Kalyan. And this opportunity came when BJP needed BSP's support in the trust vote in Parliament. So Kalyan was asked to sacrifice the UP chief ministership to save the Vajpayee government and accept a berth in the Cabinet.

But instead of stepping down, Kalyan got more determined to save his job. As news of the BJP's deal with Mayawati reached Kalyan, he got down to playing his cards. Holed up in his Kalidas Marg residence for three days, he began to work upon his allies, Loktantrik Congress Party and Jantantrik Bahujan Samaj Party. Kalyan's strategy was to impress upon the two allies that immediately after his ouster, Mayawati would strike against them.

The strategy worked. And the leaders of the two allies rushed to Delhi to argue Kalyan's case with the BJP bigwigs. Kalyan Singh, too, flew over to Delhi the next morning. The "Operation save Kalyan" began with all the possible arguments against any kind of tie-up with Mayawati. "Haven't you seen what she did to us on two past occasions when we extended our support to make her UP chief minister?" argued Kalyan.

He also assured the central leadership that it would not be difficult to garner support of five MPs, other than those of the BSP, provided a concerted effort was made in that direction. And in an obvious bid to impress his critics, Kalyan got down to the task of winning over the fence-sitters.

He made it a point to call on Chandra

VAJPAYEE WITH LALJI TANDON AND KALRAJ MISHRA

Shekhar and Om Prakash Chautala to plead for their support to Vajpayee. But as the D-Day was drawing closer and the political scene was hotting up in Delhi, Kalyan's detractors began to lobby with Mayawati. Kalyan's *bete noire*, Kalraj Mishra took the lead. He, apparently, met the BSP leader and assured her of following all her diktats if she helped him to become the UP chief minister. He also left no stone unturned to scuttle the chances of Lalji Tandon, whose name as Kalyan's successor was favoured by both Vajpayee as well as Mayawati.

Mayawati had initially favoured Kalyan's replacement by Kalraj Mishra with whom she enjoyed a close rapport right from the time BSP formed its first coalition government with the BJP in Uttar Pradesh. However, when the party central leadership realised that Mishra's appointment would send wrong signals, particularly since the latter doesn't enjoy a clean reputation, they backtracked.

So Kalyan could see power slipping



MULAYAM SINGH YADAV

out of his hands. But he was also not willing to sacrifice his chair for the sake of bailing out the Vajpayee government. That he was promised a berth in the central Cabinet was another matter. And, that was not what Kalyan was looking forward to. He refused to give in to the pressures of Mayawati and his detractors.

Promptly, Kalyan sought the good

offices of his old saviour, home minister L.K. Advani. It was Advani who has stood by Kalyan all along in the Vajpayee-Kalyan cold war that had been on for quite sometime. In order to save Kalyan, Advani could think of no other way than by making it clear through a press statement that "there will be no change in the UP leadership". The announcement was stated to have



With the BSP having played a decisive role in sealing the fate of the Vajpayee government, things are likely to move Mayawati's way in Lucknow too, political observers feel. But will Mayawati and Mulayam sink their differences to oust their common foe — just as they did in Delhi?

come as a surprise, even to Vajpayee.

While Kalyan revelled, and his detractors were left disillusioned, Mayawati swore to teach the BJP a lesson. All she had to do was to peep out of her window where not only Congressmen, but even the RLM and ADMK leaders were eagerly hanging out to shake hands with her. The deal was



MAYAWATI

struck and Mayawati killed several birds with one stone.

Apparently, Jayalalitha was made to believe that her BSP counterpart was changing stance to save her from the impending witch-hunt that would follow in case Vajpayee stayed on. On the other hand, both the Congress and RLM were convinced that Mayawati was willing to switch sides with the sole inten-

tion of "avenging the BJP's betrayal of 1997". Perhaps, both Vajpayee and Advani had smelt the rat, but it was too late in the day for undertaking any kind of salvage operation.

Immediately after the trust vote in Parliament sealed the fate of the 13-month-old Vajpayee government, all attention was focussed on Uttar Pradesh. After all, Mayawati had to settle scores in Lucknow. Soon Kalyan Singh rushed back to Lucknow. "I have to get down to business, so please excuse me for the next two days at least," he told SUNDAY over telephone. "There is no danger whatsoever to my government, yes I am aware that some people are gunning for me and they will try their bit, but let me assure you, they will not succeed."

Meanwhile, Kalyan Singh's detractors are squarely blaming him for Vajpayee's fall. However, his supporters wonder how a trade-off with Mayawati could have benefitted the BJP. "Mayawati's lust for power and money would not have been satisfied without a remote control over the day-to-day affairs of UP administration," said a senior party functionary. "It was a tragedy that a leader with just five MPs in the Lok Sabha and barely 49 MLAs in the state Assembly, was dictating terms to the largest party in both the places."

Kalyan's opponents are still relying on Mayawati's backing in the "Operation oust Kalyan". "If you can get him replaced, I will spare the BJP," Mayawati is alleged to have told a dissident. Not surprising, a small yet strong lobby of Kalyan's Cabinet colleagues met Vajpayee to seek Kalyan's removal. Two UP ministers, Kalraj Mishra and Lalji Tandon are said to have even gone to the extent of offering their resignations in case the party high command was still not in a position to sack Kalyan.

But, once again as in the past, developments in Delhi seem to have come to Kalyan's rescue. Dissidents, who, till last week, were demanding Kalyan's removal have changed their stance after the government fell. "The high command wants us to lie low for the time being," said one of them.

As of now, Mayawati is eager to occupy the hot seat in Lucknow. But it could only be possible if Mulayam's Samajwadi Party agreed to extend support to her. But political pundits do not see any easy rapprochement between the two rivals immediately. •

Sherat Pradhan/Lucknow

Damn Serious

With rehabilitation at best a distant prospect, Narmada valley oustees are faced with a bleak future. But they are determined to fight to the last

Mohan Patidar is 42 but looks more than 60. A resident of Bawaria village in Kukshi tehsil of Dhar district in Madhya Pradesh, Patidar's life has been one long struggle for rehabilitation. Fourteen years ago, Patidar was evicted from his land, along with thousands of others, to make way for the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP). Now sitting under a *shamiana* to beat the Bhopal heat and occasionally mustering just enough energy to shout anti-dam slogans, Patidar mutters in a barely audible whisper: "*Sab kuch andhera hee andhera hai* (It's darkness all around)."

Patidar has reasons to be melancholic after the cruel trick fate played upon him. Already uprooted, he stands to lose 150 acres of land which will be submerged once the project is complete.

He is not alone in his plight. Sixty-year-old Baba Maharia, a tribal from Jalsindhi village in the Alirajpur tehsil of Jhabua district, too stands to lose approximately 100 acres. It's a bleak, hopeless situation where rehabilitation is a remote prospect, for there is just no land; what is there is a rocky, barren, uncultivable terrain.

Statistics tell a bleak story. In 1979, the Narmada Water Dispute Tribunal (1969-79) handled 456 evicted families from Maharashtra. The corresponding figure for MP was 6,147. The figures now have jumped to a staggering 6,147 and 33,104 respectively. Of these

33,104 oustee families, there are plans to rehabilitate 14,224 in Gujarat. The remaining 18,880 will be rehabilitated — or so goes the plan — in MP. But, where again is the land?

Let's take a look at the rehabilitation work in Gujarat. A survey conducted in January-February this year on evicted



The Sardar Sarovar dam

Madhya Pradesh families in Gujarat reveals that of 2,761 families, 37 per cent are without land, possession and title, 26 per cent have inadequate land and another 26 per cent have only fragmented holdings.

In MP, the situation is scarcely better. Chitta Roopa Palit, a Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) activist, says, "It took us almost six years to obtain full details and arrange a joint inspection of different rehabilitation sites. [It betrays] the

SANJEEV GUPTA



time it will be a fight till death," say NBA activists

नर्मदा वचाओ आंदोलन

lack of confidence of the Narmada Valley Development Authority (NVDA)."

The joint survey — by NBA activists, the NVDA and state revenue department officials — was possible only after the oustees started a vigorous campaign and went on an indefinite strike in Bhopal and elsewhere in the state. Over 700 Project Affected Families (PAFs) took out rallies and staged *dharnas* and demonstrations.

Eight villages in five *tehsils* in Jabua, four villages in three *tehsils* in Dhar and 15 villages in Khargone were inspected. The revelations of the survey were startling.

In 1979, the Narmada Water Dispute Tribunal (1969-79) handled 456 evicted families from Maharashtra. The corresponding figure for MP was 6,147. The figures now have jumped to a staggering 6,147 and 33,104 respectively

"From the joint survey it was clear that there is no land available in the state to resettle even one oustee according to the provisions of the NWDT. Therefore, the work on the dam needs to be stopped," say NBA activists. Asserts Alok Agarwal, an NBA activist who's also an IIT graduate. "Not a single hectare of the land was found to be good-quality irrigable land; 95 per cent was completely uncultivable while the rest was encroached."

Stung by the criticism, NVDA officials dismissed the claims as false and exaggerated. Says Ravindra Sharma, vice-chairman of the NVDA and additional

Major dams on the Narmada in MP

Indira Sagar Project

Location: Punasa, Khandwa
Cost of construction: Rs 3496.79 crore
To irrigate: 1.23 lakh hectares
Proposed installed capacity: 1,000 MW
To be submerged: Approx. 93,000 acres of land; 40,000 hectares of dense forest; 249 villages
To be rehabilitated: 50,000 families (approx.)

Maheshwer Hydel Power Project

Location: Maheshwer, West Nimar
Cost of construction: Rs 1,570 crore
Installed capacity: 400 MW; Firm power — 49 MW
Estimated cost of power: Rs 6-8 per unit
To be submerged: 61 villages
To be rehabilitated: 6-8,000 families.

Man Project

Location: Dhar
Cost of construction: Rs 106 crore

A submerged village

To irrigate: 0.15 lakh hectares; 54 per cent of the command area already irrigated

To be affected: 17 villages
To be rehabilitated: 1,000-1,500 families

Jobat Project

Location: Jhabua
Cost of construction: Rs 96 crore
To irrigate: 0.985 lakh hectares; 74 per cent area already irrigated
To be affected: 13 villages and (approx.) 1,000 families to be displaced.
 Three villages of the project's command area already affected by the Sardar Sarovar Project

Lower Gol Project

Location: Badwani
Cost of construction: Rs 164.45 crore
To irrigate: 0.137 lakh hectares; 84 per cent of the area already irrigated
To be submerged: 9 villages; 900 families to be evicted.
 Construction yet to begin

Upper Veda Project

Location: Khargone
Cost of construction: Rs 89.17 crore
To irrigate: 0.099 lakh hectares
To be affected: 14 villages; about 800 families to be evicted
 Construction yet to begin



A police ferry being used to forcibly evict villagers

chief secretary of the state government: "There should be at least some truth. There may be some encroachment, but it is not true that not a single oustee can be rehabilitated."

TTrue or false? Unfortunately, as statistics are tossed back and forth to make and counter allegations, the oustees continue to suffer. But the scene has heated up. NBA activists, claiming that the state government has duped the oustees, are now on a fast-unto-death strike in Bhopal. "It is our belief that the spurious claim of land availability in Madhya Pradesh also influenced the Supreme Court's decision to order an increase in the dam's height," alleges NBA activists. They are also demanding a review of all the big dams.

NBA activists also held a meeting

Shaky Terrain

Submergence of arable land and rehabilitation of evictees are not the only problems

There are 29 large, 135 medium and over 3,000 small proposed projects on the Narmada river which originates from Amarkantak in Madhya Pradesh. Besides the submergence of arable land and rehabilitation of evictees, there is another, perhaps a more dangerous threat — reservoir induced seismicity. Last year in January, the state government organised a workshop to deal with the problem.

Narmada valley has a history of tremors. The river flows in a 6,000 lakh-year-old Pre-Cambrian Rift and seismologists believe that the dams built in these areas, said to be seismically sensitive, may cause earthquakes.

The fear is not entirely unfounded. Recently the water level of wells in Sajwani village of Badwani district increased overnight, apparently without reason. Naturally, the villagers are apprehensive. Sajwani is just six kilometres from the submergence area of the Sardar Sarovar Project and ten kilometres from the Lower Gori project. Two villages near Sajwani — Silawad and Pipri Dhanora had already experienced tremors in 1990.

Tremors have regularly rocked Pandhana village in Khandwa from 12 September, 1998 onwards. So far, the villagers have already counted more than a thousand.

Between 21 August, 1979 and 10 September, 1985, there were 34 tremors near Sukta dam. Sukta is near Pandhana. On 22 May, 1997, the tremors which rocked areas near the Bargi dam also shook Jabalpur city.

The workshop in Bhopal recommended the setting up of a task force, comprising officials of the Narmada Valley Development Authority and Disaster Management Institute, Bhopal, to conduct a joint probe into this phenomenon of reservoir induced seismicity. Environmentalist Medha Patkar too is part of this task force. •

with chief minister Digvijay Singh. Later, the state government decided to prepare a status report on different projects — both proposed and under construction — on the Narmada and its tributaries. The government has also said it would review the Gori and Veda projects where work has just started or is in the initial stage. Regarding the Jobat project in Jhabua, the government has agreed to have the issues raised by NBA activists examined.

However, work on the Man project in Dhar and the Indira Sagar Project in Khandwa can't be stopped. A lot of money has already been spent and work has progressed a long way.

But NBA activists are not ready to stop agitating. "We will fight till death," they say. Indeed, it's a crucial time for them. The 14-year-old movement has already given a new perspective to big dam projects and issues regarding environment, relief and rehabilitation. The final hearing for the SSP begins in May

and this will be one hell of a fight for survival.

Initially organised as state-wise groups of SSP oustees — the Narmada



Medha Patkar makes a point

Dharangrast Samiti in Maharashtra, the Narmada Asargrast Samiti in Gujarat and the Narmada Ghati Navnirman Samiti in MP — within two to three years these groups coalesced into a single movement — the Narmada Bachao Andolan.

In Madhya Pradesh, the NBA is agitating against the Indira Sagar Project, the Maheshwer Hydel Project (the first-ever private hydel project in the country) and various other medium and big projects. The state government on its part also formed a task force after the indefinite hunger strike of NBA activists in Maheshwer last year to search for alternative methods of water resources development in the Narmada valley. One of the recommendations of the task force was a complete review of the economic viability of the Indira Sagar Project.

But a year later, the government is still ignoring the task force report. •

Deekshdeep Saxena/Bhopal

Pramod-darshan

Prasar Bharati has become the I&B minister's personal fiefdom



Shri Pramod Mahajan has been telling us, ever since he took over information and broadcasting, that he never interferes with Prasar Bharati. And Pramod Mahajan is an

honourable man. Of course, he has also said in no uncertain terms that since radio and TV are financed by the government, they owe the government some returns and these have been extracted with some compound interest in recent weeks.

Now cricket and other sports programmes can be kicked around, as every DD-watcher knows (and they watch only when they have no alternative). Endless programmes can be cancelled and substituted with the extravaganza of the moment. Such as the big first birthday bash of the BJP government, with Indian history skipping a whole century, at the historical Hauz Khas monument. It seems only The Morning Walkers' Association protested about the garbage and litter left behind. The advice of the Archaeological Survey of India to spare the monument having been ignored, the whole bash brazenly went live on DD.

However, the ownership of Prasar Bharati as the minister's own *jagir* was proved during the match at Mohali, which set a precedent for the match at Bangalore and presumably all future matches. Mahajan put on the headphones and dislodged one commentator in the commentary box as he tried to look professional. He then confessed he had never played cricket, but stopped his car to watch cricket wherever he could. Viewers anxious to get expert comments from Ravi Shastri and co. had to listen instead to the story of Mahajan's life, which was singularly unexciting. This went on for well over an hour. Who could say NO to the minister or ask him to clear out? No one, of course. But then, he said he never interferes with Prasar Bharati. And Mahajan is an honourable



Pramod Mahajan with his son: the I&B minister interrupted a cricket commentary on TV to give the viewers the story of his life

man. In fact, no minister, and there have been many of them who also wanted to be TV stars, has had it so good. Now Mahajan doubles as official spokesman and I&B minister. He is in the DD News all the time, sometimes more than the Prime Minister.

However, the climax came with the George Fernandes interview by Karan Thapar. *On the Record*, which normally lasts half an hour, was extended to one and a half hours, no less. Don't tell us that it was Doordarshan's decision or CEO Kejriwal's. The interview made for good viewing, with two people as articulate as Thapar and Fernandes, even if some of the answers by Fernandes were good drama but a little unconvincing. But did this 90-minute marathon have to be repeated and full-page advertisements, allegedly running into seven figures, run in the most important dailies so that no one missed it? No prizes for guessing who paid for the advertisements. Now this is not interference is it? And if after over 30 years of

pussy-footing, DD has suddenly bent the rules and allowed a 90-minute interview in two parts to be telecast on the same day, well, don't tell us it is not interference. I have known DD since its birth, and never have I come across such a long interview, let alone by a minister who was allegedly putting his case across to the general public. And if this is a democracy, should not DD, like all autonomous broadcasting organisations, allow Vishnu Bhagwat a reply?

We end by asking again. Why do cricket and other important non-political events always have to be victimised to suit the government's whims? Does it not imply constant interference by the government? If live events have to move from channel to channel and have to be interrupted for long spells to accommodate political news, it goes to prove, first, that DD's much-vaunted new sports channel cannot cope. And second, that there is positive interference from the government. Not a pleasant thought after all those denials. •

The new chief

Radha Kishan Malviya takes over as the Pradesh Congress president in MP

When Rajiv Gandhi was Prime Minister, he had Radha Kishan Malviya as the minister of state for parliamentary affairs and labour. There was a major labour strike during which a *dharna* was held on railway tracks near Delhi. Traffic was disrupted. When newsmen asked Malviya about the *dharna*, his answer stunned them. "Railway track per baithe hain, to yeh railway ka mamla hua (the labourers were sitting on railway tracks. So this was railway ministry's problem)." Not that Malviya was witty. Not knowing about his ministry's activities, he was just talking nonsense.

The same Malviya is now the Congress' choice as the president of Madhya Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC). After his elevation to the top job, a senior Congressman remarked: "He is our third successive puppet PCC chief." It started with Parasram Bharadwaj, followed by Urmila Singh — a minister in Digvijay Singh's Cabinet — and now Malviya. The new PCC president is a Rajya Sabha member and this is Malviya's successive term. Speaking to SUNDAY, he said: "In politics, I am Sonia Gandhi's man."

Finding the right man for the job at the PCC has always been difficult for the party, especially in Madhya Pradesh. There is no dearth of political heavyweights. The likes of Arjun Singh, Madhavrao Scindia, Kamal Nath, Suresh Pachauri — this time he was a candidate — the two Shukla brothers and chief minister Digvijay Singh always wanted to install their own men.

This time also, there were many aspirants. Congress sources say that if Arjun Singh wanted Raj Bahadur Singh as the PCC chief, Madhavrao Scindia wanted to install Vitthal Bhai Patel. Then there was Suresh Pachauri. But Malviya's caste — he is a Brahmin — was the main obstacle.

Charan Das Mahant had the early advantage. A former minister in the Digvijay Singh Cabinet and now an MP, Mahant is a scheduled caste from the Chhattisgarh region. He was lobbying hard and had successfully obtained the blessings of his former mentor Arjun Singh and chief minister Digvijay



Malviya with Digvijay Singh: teaming up

Singh. Mahant was the right man even 24 hours before Malviya's name was cleared.

Mahant is now wondering how it happened. "Digvijay Singh was backing me. He got my name cleared by Arjun Singh. Then what went wrong?" he reportedly asked his party colleagues. Congress sources point out that Mahant's case was weakened because he was not perceived by the party as being very pliable. Moreover, Madhav Rao Scindia was against Mahant's elevation to the top job.

Congress sources say that it was M.L. Fotedar who got Malviya appointed as

MPCC president. As Malviya was in Rajiv Gandhi's Cabinet, Sonia also knew him. When his name came up, Digvijay Singh did not oppose. "The CM lobbied for me," Malviya pointed out later.

Parasram Bharadwaj was a V.C. Shukla loyalist when he became the PCC president. He even accepted the fact that he was "a rubber stamp of Vidya bhai." Then came Urmila Singh. She was a consensus candidate and suited everybody except the Congress party. And Malviya is third in the row.

Despite being a senior party functionary, Malviya is still a nonentity in Madhya Pradesh's Congress politics. But he seems to be the man for the moment for Digvijay Singh because the PCC elections are going to be held under the leadership of Malviya.

The new PCC president is likely to be elected by July. Malviya says he will be a candidate. Ever since his first stint as MP chief minister, Digvijay was facing trouble from the Congress organisation. Observers feel that with Malviya in place, the CM will have less of worries. •

Deeplax Saxena/Bhopal

Finding a PCC president in Madhya Pradesh is no easy task. There is no dearth of political heavyweights — Arjun Singh, Madhavrao Scindia, Kamal Nath and Digvijay Singh — who would like to install their own men

Mr President...

Save the armed forces from the politicians

One hopes the President of India and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, Mr K.R. Narayanan, watched the proceedings of the House during the vote of confidence. Senior service officers who did listen to the debate were seized by a sense of shame and revulsion over the words and deeds of the majority of the members of the House.

The military stands for principles, ethics, honesty, loyalty, discipline and most of all, the security and welfare of the country. The elected representatives of the country demonstrated the complete anti-thesis of these values and priorities on the floor of the House and outside it. The security and welfare of the country was not their number one concern. Their own and their party's security and welfare figures first always and every time.

And paradoxically it is these very members of the House who are charged by the Constitution to exercise political control over the military.

The honourable President has called himself a working President. It is high time he also functioned as a working Supreme Commander, breaking out of the cocoon of Rashtrapati Bhavan towards helping maintain the dignity of the armed forces and the security of the nation. The totally uncalled for vote of confidence and subsequent defeat of the government was also seen as defeat of the armed forces, judging by the way some speakers tried to denigrate national security in order to score political points.

Many military officers had come to regard the outgoing government as the first to take up the question of national security seriously and in earnest. The inevitable dismissal of Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat — not for the reasons described in the media and Parliament — became part of these concerns. The officers



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talk not just about Pokharan II, Agni II, National Security Council, greater autonomy for the armed forces and involvement in decision making but of the changed ambience of confidence building created by the previous government.

Despite his maverick methods, George Fernandes proved himself a working defence minister who did a great deal not only to improve the operational preparedness of the military but also the lot of its *jawans*.

Outside Gate no 11, the entry to the Ministry of Defence, one of the drivers of the ministry tells this story: life was easy during the time of Mulayam Singh Yadav, he rarely came to office. This man, George Fernandes, is in the office all the time.

Previous incumbents of this office and governments have a proven record of neglecting the armed forces. The 42-year long record of Congress governments is singularly undistinguished and inept. Particularly mystifying was its indecisiveness over the nuclear option and the Agni II tests. The Congress took the cake in the decade of the Nineties first by freezing the defence budget and later putting the navy in cold storage, persistently ignoring the unprecedented complaints of service chiefs about decline in operational readiness.

The fall of the government is bound to lead to greater instability and lack of continuity. Both will harm the painstaking process of building national security kickstarted last year. By the end of this

month, we might have had the first ever national security document — the Indian nuclear security document. This will probably go into hibernation now.

Things are already moving in the reverse gear. The biannual Army Commanders' conference is traditionally held in the third week of April. The Prime Minister and the defence minister address the regional military commanders, reassuring them of the government's resolve and commitment to national security. It is a big morale boosting interlocking of the civilian and military leadership of the country. In repeat of April 1997, without a government in place, the commanders' conference was held in limbo.

Similarly, sensitive negotiations verging on a breakthrough are in the offing with the US and neighbours Pakistan and China, on the nuclear question — minimum nuclear deterrent, nuclear restraint, strategic stability and border disputes. Their momentum unfortunately will be checked while fresh confidence-building measures are put in place. The Supreme Commander has triggered a process, the consequences of which were probably not thought through.

Why blame the President alone. The process of destabilisation was initiated by parties and Members of Parliament whose lust for power came to supercede national interests. That this was their priority was evident from the thrust and tenor of the vote of confidence debate in Parliament. Bhagwat was not an issue and therefore should never have been brought up in Parliament in the first place.

But it was hijacked. The admiral encouraged and the Opposition unashamedly obliged using his affidavit for furthering their political cause of unseating the government. In fact, the first formal chapter of politicising the military was written by some of its members in the 12th Lok Sabha. Very few of them had bothered to read the defence ministry's rebuttal of the admiral's charges and the explanation of his dismissal. Instead, they preferred newspaper clippings to official documents. Even fewer had cared to ascertain the high state of morale of the armed forces, especially the navy. By painting it otherwise, they misled the House.

It was not surprising the Leader of the Opposition Sharad Pawar was the

only erstwhile defence minister/Prime Minister who espoused Bhagwat's case. Reason? In the navy, Pawar is referred to as Bhagwat's godfather.

On the other hand, former Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar, who was part of the select committee privy to the Bhagwat files, categorically rejected any debate on Bhagwat's dismissal or his char-

PM stooped to a new low by accusing in Parliament a serving general and the deputy chief of army staff of having tampered with his own confidential report. This is as preposterous as it is unprecedented.

There was an immediate uproar led by the army chief himself. Until now, unlike the air force and the navy, which



H.D. DEVE GOWDA

ges against George Fernandes. He went a step further — justified the official handout saying the select committee had authorised it. Unfortunately even veteran parliamentarians like Somnath Chatterjee and Indrajit Gupta chose to become victims of the Bhagwat propaganda rather than rely on saner instincts and information.

Between H.D. Deve Gowda and Subramanian Swamy, it is a toss up who should get a Mention in Despatches — Gowda for exposing the alleged corruption in the Russian T-90 tank deal or Subramanian Swamy for establishing LTTE's elaborate links with George Fernandes. Neither speaker was restrained by the Chair or other members of the House for hurting national security.

On the T-90 tank, Deve Gowda left nothing unsaid that the adversary would not have lapped up except that the tank was selected when he was Prime Minister. But Deve Gowda committed the ultimate blasphemy by citing disparagingly the name of the highly reputed tank corp general, S.S. Mehta, at present in charge of the tank project. The former

recently underwent a momentary stir, the army has kept its house in good order. With the firing of the anti-tank missile by Deve Gowda on his own army, he has joined the ranks of the Krishna Menons.

The demand by the likes of Subramanian Swamy and Jayalalitha for the reinstatement of Bhagwat has confirmed that civilian understanding of military ethos and convention is non-existent. That no one heckled or interrupted George Fernandes during his bit on Bhagwat sent a clear message. But Bhagwat will no doubt claim he brought down an elected government.

Till a new House is constituted, Members of Parliament who wish to show off their new-found knowledge of Russian tanks, the Navy Act or LTTE's devious network should first validate their expertise with military professionals before risking a reckless presentation in Parliament on national security. •

(The author was a general officer commanding of the Indian Peace-Keeping Force in southern Sri Lanka. He is the founder member of the Defence Planning Staff of the Chiefs of Staff Committee)

The ageing hero

But Azhar's removal at this stage may not augur well for the team

Experience or expediciency? This is the question upmost in the minds of cricket enthusiasts as the country debates the Azharuddin issue. It is unfortunate that the controversy over the veteran batsman's captaincy should hot up weeks before the World Cup.

But then, the man most responsible for this untimely debate is Mohammad Azharuddin himself. Having got the captaincy by default (his detractors suspect more than that when Krishnamachari Srikkanth was unceremoniously dumped), Azhar began this phase of his career with a bang. His successes far outweighed the team's losses.

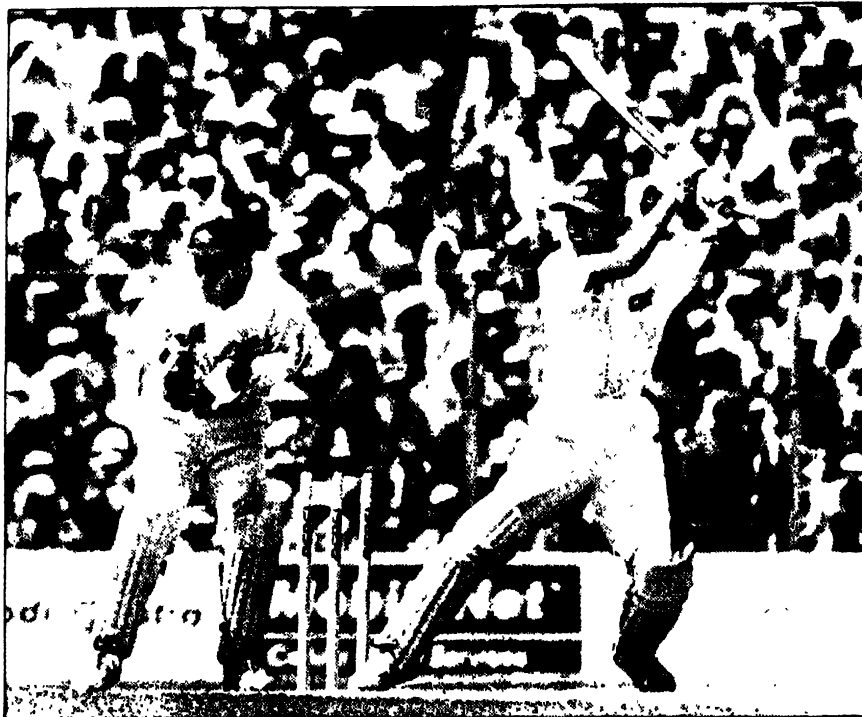
From the beginning, however, he was never considered a team man. While initially Ajit Wadekar guided him smoothly through the roughs, he had never shown an inclination to interact with his team-mates except for brief parleys with Sachin Tendulkar and Anil Kumble on the field.

Through most of his years as skipper, Azhar maintained his form. His contributions meant a lot for the team. And the fact that the team was generally doing well helped his image.

But, in the last few series, Azhar's bat (or is it his mental attitude or, worse still, his reflexes?) has let him down. Niggling injuries only added to the picture of an ageing, tired hero whose will to win had seemingly evaporated.

His performance, both as player and captain, has been so poor that it has taken its toll on the team. In sharp contrast was the body language of the Pakistanis, who seemed to be toying with the Indians, both in India and at Sharjah. And yet, these very same players' attitude towards the game seemed to change dramatically when Ajay Jadeja led them.

It is difficult to gauge whether there was any politics in this attitudinal somersault. But the fact remains that India played as a team. Win or lose, they gave their all under Jadeja. And the bubbly batsman led from the front, much as Azhar used to. The only difference was that Jadeja maintained a running dialogue with his team-mates, especially while fielding. And he always had a word of advice or praise for his bowlers.



Azharuddin is a failure as captain. But it is certain that his summary removal from the squad, or from captaincy at this late stage, would shatter the side psychologically

The only person backing Azhar to the hilt has been manager Anshuman Gaekwad. But now that Jadeja's approach has come in for all-round praise, he is hard put to justify Azhar's continuance as captain.

What Gaekwad told journalists after India's umpteenth loss at Sharjah, however, needs to be taken seriously. It is a fact that Azharuddin is a failure as captain. It is also difficult to see him get into the side as a middle-order bat in the current set-up, on his current form. But it is certain that his summary removal from the squad, or from captaincy at this late stage, would shatter the side psychologically.

Considering India's current form, it is highly improbable that it would reach the World Cup semi-finals. Miracles like 1983 apart, the squad is nowhere near the professionalism displayed by

the Australians or South Africans. It is not that India doesn't have the talent. It is just that the Indians don't play like a team, an aspect that has propelled some other countries with a load of average players to the top.

To make matters worse, Bobby Simpson isn't getting a look-in, thanks to the Gaekwad-Azharuddin combine. Even the physio, Andrew Kokinos, seems to be on the way out. Outside help may not always be welcome, though Gaekwad's greatest fan (does he have any?) will not equate him with Simpson, at least in the mental department of the game.

But then, the Board of Control for Cricket in India has never been known to differentiate between what is vital and what may just be functionally necessary. •

Arijit Sen/Calcutta

HUMAN RIGHTS

Extreme measures

Latvian and Russian undertrials in the Purulia arms-drop case allege torture in custody

Even as the Purulia arms-drop case drags on for three-and-a-half years now, it has taken a new turn last fortnight. The mystery of where the payload of arms came from, who wanted them and why was the consignment dropped in a remote West Bengal countryside has not yet been solved. And now, one more has been added to the list of unanswered questions: were the undertrial crew members of the AN-26B aircraft, allegedly responsible for the arms drop, beaten up in jail?

Apparently, such a question should have yes or no as answer. But not in this case. Contradictory statements have been filed at the court by the prisoners and the state. And to complicate matters further, both parties have come up with conflicting medical opinion to back up their claims.

The state lawyer has asserted that no incident of assault took place and that state doctors who had examined the crew

members found no injury. He, however, admitted that there were efforts to force-feed the prisoners because their life was in danger as a result of a continuing hunger-strike at Presidency Jail, Calcutta.

The story begins there. On 8 April, captain A. Klishine (a Russian), first officer O. Gaidash, flight engineer I. Timmerman and cargo handler E. Antimenko (all Latvians) of the AN-26B, submitted a petition to the judge, 4th Bench, city sessions court, Calcutta. It said that they were unable to attend court that day due to "severely poor health".

The poor health, they added, was "not due to our hunger strike but is entirely due to the severe and brutal beating administered to us by some 50 jail staff on the night of the 6th April."

Later, they submitted detailed statement describing the sequence of events. According to the complaint, some doctors from the SSKM Hospital came and examined them on the

STRONG ARM TACTICS: *Latvian undertrials in the arms-drop case*



afternoon of 6 April, the seventh day of their hunger-strike demanding a speedy trial. It was a routine check-up and on earlier occasions the reports were shown to the prisoners. But that day it was given to the jail superintendent without being shown to them.

Later, they were told that they would be taken to the SSKM Hospital for some tests. Initially they refused, thinking that the journey would cause exhaustion that might diminish their strength to continue the hunger-strike. But when the superintendent told them that the doctors responsible for monitoring them were waiting at the hospital and that they would be brought back the same day, they agreed to go.

However, on reaching the hospital they were surprised to learn that the hospital authorities had no prior information regarding their visit and that they had been sent with a letter from the jail superintendent which said they were to be hospitalised and force-fed. At this, they protested vehemently, saying that they could be hospitalised only by a court order.

When they were brought back, the prison authorities allegedly refused to let them in. They were kept standing at the office gates for a long time and repeatedly told to go back to the hospital. When all efforts failed, about 50 prison guards were called in. According to their statement, they were beaten and kicked severely for about half-an-hour, thrown into a prison van and sent to the SSKM Hospital again.

When they reached the hospital, they were kept in the van for about an hour before being taken back to jail. No doctors attended them till 10 on the following morning, though, they complained, Gaidash had been unconscious and his cellmates called out for first-aid.

The statement also alleged that the deputy inspector-general and assistant inspector-general of prisons and some officers of the Central Bureau of Investigation, which is handling the case, were present and giving instructions to the guards during the violence.

Dr V. Tselinsky, physician of the Russian consulate in Calcutta, examined the crew members on 7 April. In his report, he noted "numerous scratches, bruises and abrasions on all pilots, Oleg Gaidash has closed breakage of two ribs with deep bruise sized 6x6 cm on it, and the other deep bruise on the top of his head sized 2x2 cm".

Meanwhile, the other undertrial crew member, Igor Moskvitin, a Latvian, is reported to be severely ill since May 1997, when he first complained of chest pain, cough and fever.

The report complained that the hospital failed to provide good hygienic conditions and nutritious food which were necessary for the treatment. To illustrate his point, he noted that in November 1998, Moskvitin contracted malaria, which relapsed in February 1999. "Three times the patient was bitten by rats in the hospital, last time on February 16, 1999. I saw the traces of the rat bite on a leg of the patient, when [I] visited him on February 17, 1999," the doctor alleged.

Following concerns expressed by the Russian government over the allegations of assault and medical neglect, K.L. Kshetrapal, secretary in the ministry of external affairs, was sent to Calcutta to investigate. His findings are not yet known.

The prisoners, on their part, have petitioned the State Human Rights Commission seeking protection for their lives, compensation for the physical damages and setting up of human rights cells in prisons to monitor the condition and treatment of those in custody. •

Nilanjan Dutta/Calcutta

HERITAGE

Train to UNESCO

Efforts are on to include Darjeeling's toy train in the world heritage list

Will Darjeeling's toy train find its place in UNESCO's world heritage list? If things go according to plan, then the piece of history from the hills may well be the chosen one. UNESCO's International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICMS) is likely to meet in Paris in the middle of this year. During the meeting, the ICMS representative Robert Lee will submit his report on the toy train. Lee has already visited Darjeeling to study the 120-year-old train service linking Siliguri with the queen of hills stations.

During his visit, Lee studied three aspects of the toy train — the engineering side, the social and economic aspects, and beauty. Barring the economic aspect — which is grim due to a number of factors — Lee has found very little which can derail the train's inclusion in the list. If the toy train is granted world heritage status, it will be Indian government's responsibility to preserve it. Funds may also come from the UNESCO for its upkeep.

Speaking to SUNDAY, Darjeeling Planters' Association (DPA) secretary Ranen Dutta said that the Darjeeling Himalayan Railways (DHR) Heritage Foundation was formed five years back to spearhead the campaign to preserve the train as a heritage piece. When the railway authorities were

Calling all miners

The Congress woos mining workers in south Bihar

Lakhs of rupees allegedly spent by the Central Coalfields Limited (CCL) for holding a workers meet at Ranchi has landed the company in trouble. The meet is being perceived as a Congress-sponsored show, and after complaints were made by local leaders, the Parliament standing committee on public accounts has sought the details of expenditure made in this regard from CCL.

According to reports, the CCL had contributed Rs 15 lakh for organising the all-India mining workers' meet. Though the conference was held under the banner of Indian National Mines Workers' Federation (INMWF), Congress heavyweights from the area were believed to be calling the shots.

A senior CCL official told SUNDAY that the company had its own compulsions. He also pointed out that the CCL could not say no to such high-profile leaders like Rajendra Singh — the Congress MLA from Bermo. Singh is well known for his clout in the company and its Calcutta-based apex body Coal India Limited.

Surprisingly, it was Chandrashekhar Dubey, chairman of the reception committee, who lashed out at some prominent leaders involved in organising the meet. He said that

PRADIP SANYAL



OLD WORLD CHARM: the toy train at Ghoom

toying with the idea of winding up the service, the DHR Heritage Foundation raised its voice and the move was shelved.

At a seminar, the DHR Heritage Foundation spoke to Prithviraj Pereira — head of UNESCO's Asian Chapter — on the future of the toy train, urging him to include it in the heritage list. "Meanwhile, under pressure from different quarters, the railways changed their mind," said Dutta. According to him, the tea industry also came up with a proposal to refurbish the dilapidated coaches. During his visit, Lee was accompanied

it was unfair to squander public money in such a fashion. Nearly Rs 1 crore was spent to organise the three-day meet from 21 to 23 March. All the big hotels in Ranchi were booked. So were the cars. The town was decorated with flags and a number of gates were erected.

Sources say that apart from the CCL contribution of Rs 1 lakh from its community development fund, money was

AT THE RECEIVING END: coal miners



by National Railway Museum director Rajesh Agarwala. He is also hopeful of the train getting world heritage status.

The toy train also drew the attention of the international media. Film director Yaavar Abbas came down from USA with his team to capture the journey. Abbas later told SUNDAY that he was making a film for the Discovery Channel which will be shown in the *Extreme Machines* series. Abbas has chosen three railway systems of the world and Darjeeling's toy train was one of them.

The DHR main line originates from Siliguri, 398 ft above sea-level, and runs along the Hill Cart Road for about 18 km upto Sukna. It then climbs the foothills, reaching an altitude of 7,407 ft at Ghoom, 75 km from Siliguri. Then it descends for about 6.4 km till it terminates at Darjeeling at an altitude of 6,812 feet.

And the crowning glory of the toy train is its gentle speed of 10-15 kmph. It takes no less than eight hours to complete each leg of its 81-km journey. Though more and more people these days are preferring the bus, jeep or cars, the train retains its fan following, especially among foreign tourists. One can now take a ride between Darjeeling and Ghoom for Rs 80.

Old hands at the DHR feel nostalgic when they talk about the past. Times were when 5,000 people worked at the DHR. Now it has a mere 400. The number of engines have gone down to 14 from 54. Only heritage status can arrest the slide, they feel.

Even if the toy train makes a comeback in Darjeeling's hills, Tiny and her sisters will no longer be seen chugging up the tracks. The new-age toy train will be pulled by diesel engines. •

Iva Guha/Siliguri

raised from other coal companies to meet the expenses. Altogether, 12 foreign delegates from Sweden, England, South Africa, Philippines and Japan attended the meet along with 1,500 delegates from across the country. Among leaders present were INTUC national secretary G. Sanjiva Reddy and former Lok Sabha Speaker P.A. Sangma who attended the meet on the last day.

Although the conference was convened to discuss the miners' plight, the deliberations ended even without discussing the working condition of CIL employees. But why did the Congress put its weight behind the workers' meet?

It is believed that the Congress is making a desperate effort to salvage its hold among Bihar's industrial workers and the party has started by wooing the mining workers. Sources point out that it was Congress' regional leadership, with endorsement from the high command, which made the party grab the opportunity to use the INMWF platform to address the workers. After the political setback in Bihar following the reinstatement of the Rabri Devi government and the Senari massacre, the party leadership had directed leaders with mass base in the mining areas of south Bihar to get going.

Meanwhile, reacting to explanations sought by the public accounts committee, CCL personnel director Deval Sahay denied the charges and told SUNDAY that the company had not lent any money for the workers' meet from its community development fund and that it had already informed the committee of this. •

D.P. Sharan/Ranchi

Amma-speak

Jayalalitha stood out in Simi Garewal's serene confessional booth

Simi Garewal's rendezvous with the rich and famous is back again, same place, same time (Tuesdays, 9.30 pm STAR Plus). And it's more of the same: the sets are white, off-white, or, when the scenarist is feeling very adventurous, cream; the outfits which adorn the hostess complement the environs beautifully. And it's all very simpatico, and gracious.

The only discordant notes are struck when her guests wear colour: take, for example, J. Jayalalitha's flagrant pink in her two-part episode. It made a statement; just as the AIADMK boss-lady made statements of her own.

I was a brilliant student, said the lady, without blushing. I could have been a great lawyer, great anything. But fate had something else in store for me. Amma has covered most of the ground with Rajat Sharma in his *adalar* but the



GIRL-TALK: Simi and Jayalalitha

words took on a meaning of their own in Simi's serene confessional booth. They got invested with the flavour of a girls-only sleepover, where you can let your hair down and swap cosy stories.

So we got the Amma view on life in the movies, with MGR and after, and in politics: if you go by what she said, she was thrust into all the roles she's taken on, but once there, she did her best by them. And when people get in her way, "I give back as good as I get, even better," she said. Simi smiled sweetly, disturbed not a whit that the saccharine levels in the programme were being disturbed.

Perhaps because she knew that people would forget Amma's fighting words, and retain the completely amazing sight of her warbling one of her favourite Hindi movie songs, *Aa ja sanam...* Simi sang along, in perfect tune. •

MAHARASHTRA

Back to work

The Bombay High Court reinstates Pune municipal commissioner Arun Bhatia

It was celebration time in Pune on 13 April. Not because the Indian cricket team had thrashed its arch rival Pakistan to a convincing defeat at Sharjah a day earlier. But because on that day the Bombay High Court had quashed the Maharashtra government's transfer order of IAS officer and Pune municipal commissioner Arun Bhatia and reinstated him with immediate effect.

Hearing the judgement, hundreds of Pune residents took to the streets, bursting crackers and shouting victory slogans. As for the municipal commissioner himself, he was very "happy". "It is reassuring and heartening to know that there is a place to go and get justice in our country," effused Bhatia. He was also "overwhelmed" by the "massive and sustained" support given to him by the residents of Pune. Earlier, more than 100 non-governmental organisations cutting across socio-economic barriers — representing both the slum-dwellers and also the highly educated and wealthy class — had taken to the streets in protest against the government's decision to transfer Bhatia.

On 9 March, Bhatia released a list of 163 property-tax defaulters to the press, intending to auction their property. Many defaulters hurriedly made a beeline for municipal corporation, depositing more than Rs 45 lakh which had accumulated as arrears.

He then began a demolition drive. Several illegal structures located on the one-km stretch on Jungli Maharaj Road in the business district of Deccan Gymkhana were mowed down within six hours.

On 10 March: Hotel Holiday Inn's high-profile discotheque, Totempole, where Ramakrishna Hegde recently celebrated his birthday, was razed to the ground. Next day, the demolition squad picked up Fergusson College Road, known for its eateries and encroachments on plots meant for parking.

On 12 March, a list of eight thoroughfares to face demolition was released to the media and Bhatia announced that counters would be open at the corporation headquarters and at ward offices for payment of property tax arrears. Next day, Bhatia received a fax from Mantralaya asking him to relinquish his charge forthwith.

Delivering its verdict on three public interest litigations, the High Court division Bench comprising Chief Justice Y.K. Sabharwal and Justice S. Radhakrishnan held that the actions and the demolition drive undertaken by the "admittedly upright and honest officer" deserved a pat instead of a transfer which was "in the nature of punishment".

As per the court's directive, Bhatia was back at his desk on 16 April. The state government, however, plans to challenge the HC's order in the apex court. "We're seeking legal opinion on the HC's verdict stating that since postings and transfers are the state government's prerogative, it will be difficult to run the administration owing to such judicial interference," chief minister Narayan Rane told mediapersons. •

Kaajal Walla/Bombay



SUNDAY WEEK

KUSUM BHANDARI

BEGINNING 25 APRIL, 1999

ARIES

(21 March-20 April)

The time is right for experimentation and introducing innovative methods. If you gently sow the seeds of new ideas now, people may be slowly acclimatised to them, so that they are implemented in time. Any neglect of family members should be counterbalanced by showing extra concern.

TAURUS

(21 April-20 May)

Nothing should be rushed or handled casually where finances are concerned. Think before you make decisions affecting joint funds. There is more at stake than you seem to realise. But with caution and patience, the worst can be avoided. Do not allow minor differences with partners to blow up into major rows.

GEMINI

(21 May-20 June)

It appears that you are placing unnecessary restrictions on your own actions. Have more faith in your own skills and abilities. Your high standards and applications should carry you through. There is no point in continually taking yourself to task for past mistakes or indiscretions.

CANCER

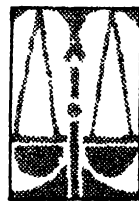
(21 June-20 July)

Loved ones can be in a rather erratic and contrary mood. But there may be a welcome boost to your personal resources from unexpected quarters. You are likely to get carried away by highfalutin ideas which, amazingly, stand a strong chance of winning sponsorship and backing.

LEO

(21 July-20 August)

You seem to be on a winning streak where business and professional affairs are concerned. It appears contented clients and customers have been doing some public relations work on your behalf. Turnover and profits can show a healthy increase, consequently.



LIBRA

(21 September-20 October)

Your hopes of carrying out plans may be thwarted. It can prove to be a pure waste of time to attempt to prevail against ruthless opposition from mates and spouses in personal matters. Illness among household members may also upset your plans, causing some real worries.

SAGITTARIUS

(21 November-20 December)

Your charm and tact are likely to make you a leading candidate for promotion. Superiors may be looking for someone who is able to mediate between opposed factions. Your skill as a diplomat may be now put to the test. A strictly down-to-earth and realistic approach to new schemes and projects is advised.

CAPRICORN

(21 December-20 January)

Conditions at work should be much to your liking. Co-workers and superiors are likely to be in a friendly and cooperative mood. You may be spared the jobs that you least like doing. Your ability to fit in with and get on with others will result in firm friendships.

AQUARIUS

(21 January-20 February)

Torn between your loved ones and business or professional demands, you are likely to have some awkward decisions to make. And it looks as though loved ones are going to lose out. Let others know how much you appreciate their help and goodwill. Students of commerce stream are likely to find new avenues.

PISCES

(21 February-20 March)

Business associates and influential people are likely to be in a helpful and cooperative mood. If you are hoping to make a proposition to a government or a public body, you should have little trouble or delay to contend with. It's an excellent time to submit manuscripts to publishers.

VIRGO

(21 August-20 September)

It should be easier to raise cash to prop up ailing business enterprises. Such intermediary measures can be sufficient to revitalise commercial operations. This, in turn, may bring in more customers and clients. Transactions can be settled most amicably in relaxed and informal circumstances.

SCORPIO

(21 October-20 November)

You are more likely to get lost in daydreams and pie-in-the-sky ideas. All kinds of mistakes can happen if you attempt to carry out employment duties or other tasks while your mind is drifting in the clouds. Attend to what you are doing.

Pathetic fallacy

■ Former law minister M. Thambi Durai's personal intervention about his 'honest' credentials in the Lok Sabha during the vote of confidence on the BJP, sounded more pathetic than credible.

Replying to a charge made by P. Chidambaram (that the law minister in the BJP government changed

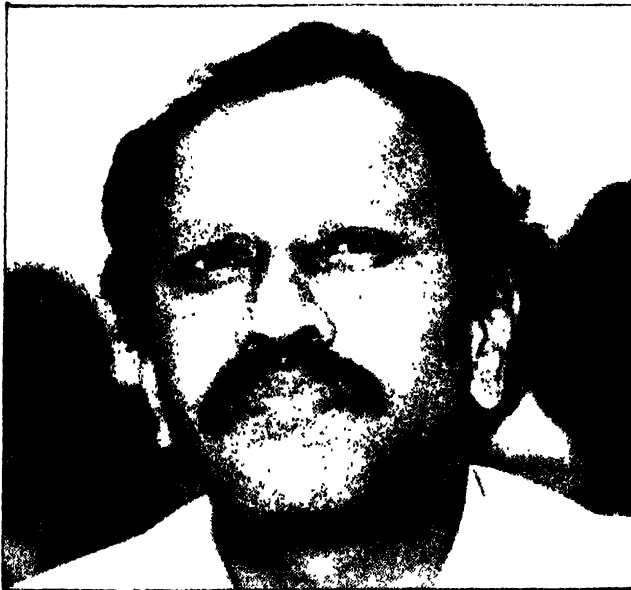
HEARD IN NEW DELHI

It was Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati who brought the government down.

SUBRAMANIAN SWAMY

But tell us who got the Lakshmi?

A REPORTER



Thambi Durai: matter of credibility

judges and laws when they proved to be inconvenient), Thambi Durai said he didn't change laws and certainly didn't shift any judges around.

Chidambaram also said that the BJP government had ministers who demanded that they be informed before anyone sought clearance for projects worth more than Rs 2 crore.

The fact is that bureaucrats in Thambi Durai's ministry had complained to the Cabinet secretary that not only was the minister keeping some files in his office for inordinately long periods, but also that the minister wanted to see

every file before it was cleared. Thambi Durai forgot to deny this in the Lok Sabha.

The stopover

■ Mohan Guruswamy is at work again. In his last missive, he wrote that finance minister Yashwant Sinha had stopped in London en route to a meeting in Paris, expressly to meet the BAT chairman, ostensibly to discuss the price at which ITC shares held by financial institutions could be sold off. Guruswamy wrote that Sinha had stopped in London despite considerable expense to the exchequer, while sending his colleagues on to Paris.

The fact is that Sinha did stop in London but did not meet the BAT chairman. This is as much fiction as Guruswamy's other write-ups.



Mohan Guruswamy: fact or fiction?

During the vote of confidence on the BJP government, former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda kept reading out from the Guruswamy papers and criticising Sinha. When Sinha had had enough, he got up and kept refuting every point that "former Prime Minister Deve Gowda" had made.

Don't bank on them

■ For months economists have been sounding warnings about non-banking finance companies. Now, those warnings sound prophetic. Another NBFC, the Kuber group, has fallen through decamping with crores of rupees of small unsuspecting investors.

The Kuber group is said to have had assets in UP and Delhi and large parcels of land in Noida. They are said to be close to politicians in UP and have thus been getting away with many land scams.

Now that the promoters, the Sharma brothers, have fled, the government is getting wise to the fact that all the offers of help from the Sharmas may not have been as innocent as they appeared to be. •

CHECK - LIST

Finance ministers as orators

■ **Manmohan Singh:** What he lacks in oratorical skills, he makes up by the sheer force of his academic personality. When Manmohan Singh talks, very few think of interrupting him.

■ **P. Chidambaram:** A brilliant speaker simply because he speaks with conviction — even when he is not totally convinced about the point he's making, like supporting a Jayalalitha-supported Congress.

■ **Yashwant Sinha:** Speaks with sincerity, is democratic about conceding points to the Opposition and refuses to respond to baiting.

■ **V.P. Singh:** Not the best orator in the world, especially as he has the tendency to bite off the latter part of every sentence he speaks. But is definitely better in Hindi than in English.

Irresponsible attitude

■ It is because of behaviour of people like this that the BJP government lost power.

Recently, former information minister Pramod Mahajan addressed reporters in Bombay. It was not a public meeting or a get-together of partymen. But his party is always happy to embarrass him, regardless of the time or place. So a group of Bajrang Dal activists came to the function and began raising slogans — about their right



Pramod Mahajan: a victim of circumstances

to carry out the Govansh Puja, against cow slaughter. The slogans were directed against Mahajan and the state government.

The Bajrang Dal is a member of the *sangh parivar*. The government in Maharashtra is the BJP-Shiv Sena's. The government has to consider the views of the Muslims on the matter. There were some tense moments. But Mahajan carried off the situation with his usual panache.

"See, I'm the information minister. Before a serial begins, I'm used to watching the trailer and the ads. So all this doesn't bother me," he said. "Like the Mahabharat, we should be fighting together in the battleground, not against each other in closed rooms."

Sadly the Bajrang Dal didn't take his advice. What can you do if some people are bent on suicide.

HEARD IN NEW DELHI

Mayawati said she was going to meet George. How did we know she was talking about V. George?

A BJP LEADER ON THE BSP'S DEFECTION

Poll talk

■ The BJP has reconciled itself to early Assembly elections in Bihar.

Bihar BJP leader Sushil Modi met members of the election commission, as did Laloo Prasad Yadav, the husband of Bihar chief minister Rabri Devi. Both were told (separately) that the commission would like to hold Assembly elections in November, rather than March 2000.

A lot depends on this election. If there is a BJP government in place in Delhi in November, it will be able, to

some extent, to foil rigging plans which the Laloo Yadav government is getting ready with.

On the other hand, given the current decimated status of the Congress in Bihar, if the Congress improves its status even by a few seats in the Assembly, it will add to the shot in the arm it will get just before it makes a bid to form a government at the Centre.

Civic sense

■ Who said our relationship with our neighbours is not cordial?

Soon after former Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee took the bus trip to Lahore, West Bengal and Bangladesh also started a new bus service between Calcutta and Dhaka. But that's not all, the ties go beyond that.

Impressed by the civic measures undertaken by the Government of West Bengal to improve the city life in Calcutta, the Bangladesh government has invited Cal-



Asim Barman: crossing borders

cutta Municipal Commissioner Asim Barman as a consultant to address workshops on civic management being held at Dhaka at the initiative of the Asian Development Bank.

The workshop deals with how to establish 'decentralised delivery system of civic services' in Bangladesh. Conservancy, solid waste management, water supply, drainage system, etc., are some of the subjects being deliberated in the workshop.

The workshop, which is attended by the municipal officials of Bangladesh, is aimed to tone up the civic life in the country. "My job is to help them in successfully implementing the civic programmes. The Calcutta Municipal Corporation has already shown the way and now they want to learn from our experience," said Asim Barman. •

CHECK-LIST

Congress chief ministers: how they're doing

■ **Giridhar Gamang:** The replacement of J.B. Patnaik, Gamang is yet to establish his credentials in Orissa. However, the state party is going along with Gamang so far. Assembly elections due next year will decide Gamang's fate.

■ **Ashok Gehlot:** Has got a new PCC chief in Girija Vyas. Faces no immediate threat from anyone — the BJP is so badly divided that until there's a change in leadership in the state party, there can be no challenge to Gehlot.

■ **Shiela Dikshit:** Has direct access to Sonia Gandhi — this is a great plus in her favour. Is quietly and steadily pushing new younger faces in the Delhi party — which has stopped opposing her.

■ **Digvijay Singh:** His hand wasn't much in evidence when the Congress was getting ready to form a government at the Centre. Is trying to checkmate Arjun Singh, and the party is making his job easier. Accolades from the Left about his social welfare programmes are helping the Congress in doing deals with the Left.

Food can wait

During the vote of confidence in Parliament, the BJP was taking no chances. It issued a whip to all its Lok Sabha MPs asking them to be present in the House, even during the debate that preceded the voting. But since the debate carried on till late at night, most MPs decided to watch it on their



A.B. Vajpayee: sat through the debate

television sets at home.

But there was one exception. The Prime Minister decided that he should set an example. In fact, for the most part, he sat in the House. He was also keen that the debate should be concluded that night so that the vote could take place on schedule.

However, when he finally came to his room in Parliament, he was immediately offered some dinner. Busy confabulating with his aides, the Prime Minister, who had obviously lost all track of time, waved away the offer of food, he said, "Baad mein. Aaj der raat ho jayegi (Later. It will be night by the time this is over)." The astonished waiter looked at the clock which showed that the night was well under way. It was nearly midnight — but wisely said nothing.

Political compulsions

Why is Pranab Mukherjee so quiet? In the last few months,

HEARD IN PARLIAMENT

This is the first time a CM has defeated a PM.

A CONGRESS LEADER JUBILANTLY AFTER ORISSA CM GIRIDHAR GAMANG'S VOTE BROUGHT DOWN THE BJP GOVERNMENT

AICC general secretary Pranab has stayed away from taking any sides within the faction-ridden West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee. During the recent reconstitution of the state PCC, Pranab refused to antagonise anybody and kept away from manipulating the selection of his loyalists to crucial

posts in the PCC.

Moreover, he has also stopped criticising the Left Front government in West Bengal. While most political observers believe that the reason for such a stance is the new relationship that has developed between the Congress and the Left at the Centre after the fall of the BJP

CHECK-LIST

BJP: Inner-party feuds

■ **L.K. Advani versus A.B. Vajpayee:** The home minister thought it fit to refer to the 'imaginary' feud with the Prime Minister in his speech on the motion of confidence. Maybe it isn't so imaginary after all!

■ **Madan Lal Khurana versus Suchma Swaraj:** Nothing can heal that breach now. Much of the responsibility is Khurana's. But Swaraj, who is emotional, has also contributed by responding to Khurana's asinine politics.

■ **S. Patwa versus Uma Bharti:** The rivalry is on the back-burner now. But Uma Bharti lets no chance go, of dumping the blame on the BJP's defeat in the Madhya Pradesh Assembly elections, to the former chief minister.

■ **M.M. Joshi versus L.K. Advani:** Another breach which will never heal. Joshi has stakes in the politics of UP. All Advani needs to do is to interfere in UP and the whole ugly can of worms will fall open again.

■ **Madan Lal Khurana versus Pramod Mahajan:** There is no contest. Khurana wants to target Mahajan supporters in Delhi, even though they are invaluable to the party. Mahajan is just amused by the whole thing. Why does Khurana think he's living in medieval times when Mughal court politics of suggestion and innuendo was the credo?

■ **Kalyan Singh versus the rest of the party:** The man everyone loves to hate. Kalyan Singh has got a shot in the arm because of L.K. Advani's statement that there is no question of replacing him. But the UP chief minister is everyone's target because everyone wants his job.

government, the truth lies elsewhere.

Apparently, this summer Pranab Mukherjee's term in the Rajya Sabha is coming to an end. And he knows that he would not be able to win the elections without the support from the Left. So the best way to ensure another tenure in the Upper House is to keep mum and keep everyone happy.

Vital signs

Already there is some sign of the problems that the new government will face. Mulayam Singh Yadav has made it clear that the Rashtriya Loktantrik Morcha (RLM) will be part of the Congress-led government.



Mulayam Singh Yadav: wants to join the government

"Do they really expect us to stay out of government?" said a Samajwadi Party leader incredulously. "If we had wanted to do that we would have stayed in the Opposition. Now we have a government we've installed. So what will we do outside? Sing bhajans."

So this is the sign of the times to come. •

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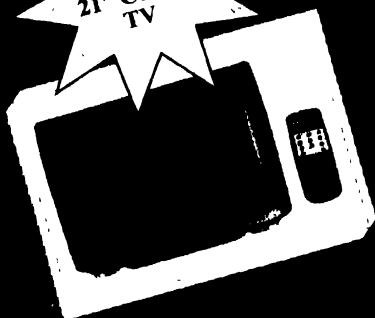
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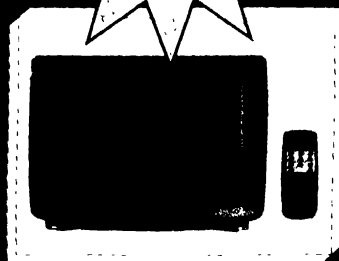
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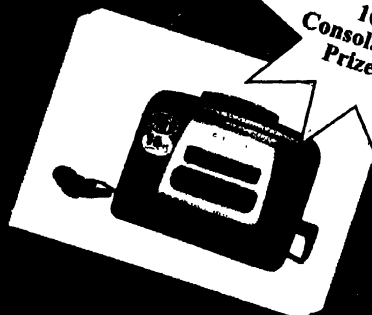
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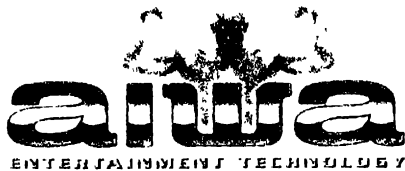
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UP: KALYAN SINGH UNDER THREAT?

SUNDAY

What a mess!

Here's who to blame for the crisis. And yet another election





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Letters.....	4
Sight and Sound.....	6
Profile.....	26
Spotlight.....	34
News.....	59
Sunday Week.....	63
Business Diary.....	64
Random Notes.....	65
Delhi Diary.....	66



BUSINESS FEATURE

Howzat!

The marketing of World Cup '99 36

HEALTH

United against AIDS

Delhi NGOs team up with college students to spread awareness about the killer disease..... 40

COLUMNS

POWER PLAY

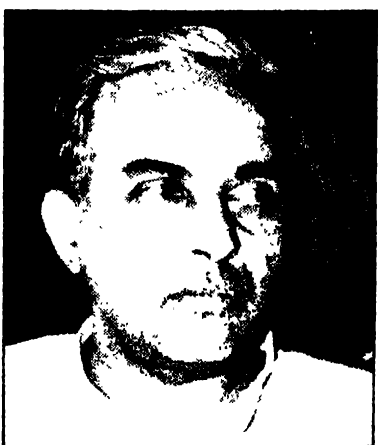
Rajiv Shukla..... 7

MANI-TALK

Mani Shankar Aiyar..... 8

THE SOUTH BLOCK

Inder Malhotra..... 11



SUNDAY SPECIAL 12

Guilty men of '99

PERSONALITY 30

Call of conscience

Saifuddin Soz makes an adroit attempt to carve out a constituency for himself among Indian Muslims



NEIGHBOURS 32

The judgement

Benazir Bhutto is sentenced to five years' imprisonment on charges of corruption





Political thriller

It is unfortunate that when things were beginning to look up for the country, the AIADMK supremo Jayalalitha withdrew her support from the BJP-led government at the Centre (*Jaya*, 18—24 April). If Jayalalitha really understood or cared about the nation, she would have realised that there could not have been a worse moment to create political turmoil.

Sadly enough, Jayalalitha

is a provincial leader who can't outgrow her provincial mindset. If she were not so provincial in her comprehension of national interest, she wouldn't have made such a noise. Maybe, she is not really her own woman. She is only being used by the Congress to do its dirty work.

The lady of Poes Gardens is sadly unaware that the Congress will dump her after they get their work done.
Sunirmal Dey, Calcutta (West Bengal)

■ Last fortnight's political drama was marked by vendetta, greed and vile ambition. The political thriller that saw the end of Vajpayee's 13-month-old government once showed how dangerous the lady of Poes Gardens can be.

One wonders how Jayalalitha, so mired in corruption, can be a deciding factor in shaping the political future of India. The "Que-

Jayalalitha: has no peers in turning a friend into an enemy



en of Contradictions" as Jayalalitha has been rightly called, made desperate attempts to unseat the Vajpayee government. The reasons she had cited to topple the central government were ridiculous. In fact, Jayalalitha has no peers in Indian politics in turning a friend into an enemy by making gratuitous attacks.

Sweta Kumar, New Delhi

Sheer hollowness

The former chief minister of Maharashtra Manohar Joshi's lofty claim that there had been no personal allegation against him only served to bring out the sheer hollowness of the political leaders of our country (*Taking it personally*, 21—27 March).

Joshi was a master manipulator and that he got the boot was no surprise at all. Leaders like him abound in Maharashtra politics. But, unfortunately public memory is woefully poor and we make the mistakes of electing these leaders time and again.

Amarnath Kamal, Bombay (Maharashtra)

Novel battle

Indian writers in English have never had it so good before (*Battle of the books*, 28 March—3 April). In the past, writers more often than not, needed to fall back on other resources to make both ends meet. But now with lump-sum royalties offered to them in advance, things have become much easier.

Writing has thus become a glamorous profession and writers become the cynosure of all eyes in the publicity campaigns associated with every book release and reading sessions. But the flipside of the whole procedure is that when marketing strate-

gy calls the shots, the quality of writing oftentimesa backseat and all the attention is focussed on the amount paid to the writer as the royalty.

It happened with Arundhati Roy and now again with Salman Rushdie and Vikram Seth and with two highly-priced novels *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and *An Unequal Music*. A symbiotic relationship has evolved between Rushdie and Seth whereby the hype of rivalry will do a world of good in promoting the sales of both the books. In the end, it is the book-lover who gets caught in a quagmire.

Bedashruti Mitra, Raigarh (Madhya Pradesh)

Time to take action

None of the article or cover stories have been as shocking and nerve-shattering as the cover story regarding the UCIL Plant at Jaduguda, Bihar (*Waiting to die*, 4—10 April). I have been an avid reader of your magazine and highly appreciate the quality of reporting and presentation of stories.

Till now, I thought that nuclear hazards were caused by the Western world alone, but the story about uranium mining shocked me like anything. The Government of India must realise the hazards posed by the radiation and take appropriate steps immediately.

Mina Zehain, Aizawl (Mizoram)

Too much cricket

The writer has rightly pointed out that the BCCI is responsible for unhealthy state of the players (*Cricket fatigue*, 4—10 April). The BCCI will have to shoulder the responsibility if any player performs badly in the World Cup.



Azharuddin: has distanced himself from the team-mates

The hectic schedule of the Indian cricket team has had a telling effect on several players. It has deprived the cricketers of rest sorely needed to perform well. The gruelling schedule has plagued Sachin's ability who has been suffering from back pain. Sachin has taken the right decision not to take part in the Triangular-series in India and the Sharjah tournament.

One hopes after the rest Sachin will deliver his best.
Amit Khosla, Biliaspur (Madhya Pradesh)

■ Skipper Azharuddin has to motivate himself and his teammates if India is to find success as a unit in the ensuing World Cup. The series of defeats over the last two months have completely demoralised the Indian team.

No one doubts Azhar's capability as a batsman. But, as a captain he has been a total failure. Azharuddin seems to have distanced himself from the other teammates. He must inspire the youngsters on the field. There has to be more communication within the side. Experience is the greatest teacher. And Azhar must use this to its fullest extent.

Sumeet Khanna, Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh)

Curry business

With the British palate acquiring a new-found taste for Indian cuisine, we Indians ought to feel elated that at least our humble curry has successfully transcended racial discrimination today (*Carrying curry to Southall*, 11—17 April). If our spicy cuisine could capture the fancy of the British, who enjoy only bland food like the perennial 'fish and chips' till date, we should try our best to promote our delectable cuisine to other countries as well.

Perhaps it won't be long before the 'curry hysteria' spreads to countries like the

US, Mexico, Thailand and the south-east Asian countries where spicy food is favoured. Promoting Indian cuisine in a big way would serve a dual purpose for India because Indian spices whose prices have dreadfully nosedived recently could capture the global market once again.
Nalini Sudhakaran, Dubai (UAE)

Bhagwat or Bhagwan

Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat seems to have substituted 'n' for 't' in his last name to become Vishnu Bhagwan, the God considered as 'trinity'—the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer and this has been aptly highlighted in the story (*In defence of the realm*, 11—17 April). His undeserved promotion laid emphasis on importance of unconscious mind, inducing its expression and evading conscious mind's censorship through analytic technique of free association and dream interpretation.

Bhagwat's claim that 'internet' gives details on nuclear submarine is not justified. He was lucky to have escaped with a minor penalty of termination of ser-

vice and not a major penalty of withholding his pension. Importantly, administrative matters need not become a political issue.

A.S. Raj, Bangalore (Karnataka)

Desire for Oscar

This refers to the story *Oscar fever* (11—17 April). The columnist posed a question: "Aren't we taking the Oscar awards a bit too seriously?" The media's



Shekhar Kapur: was *Elizabeth* denied its due?

great expectations over Shekhar Kapur's *Elizabeth* were not realised and the film got just one award and that too, in a less important category.

Why is this craze for Hollywood award? Why doesn't Shekhar Kapur feel satisfied with Filmfare's special award given to him for being director of all seasons? The charge that *Elizabeth* was denied its due because of traditional Hollywood prejudices appears to be rather unfair and uncalled for.

Onkar Chopra, New Delhi

SEPARATED AT BIRTH?

PRIZE RS 200 FOR CONTRIBUTIONS



Janardhan Poojary

Politician



N. Vittal

Chief Vigilance Commissioner

Contributed by Bharati Banerjee, Calcutta (West Bengal)

MILESTONES

DIED: Raghubir Singh, 56, one of India's most distinguished photographers, after a heart attack in New York on 18 April. He is survived by his wife, French photographer Anne de Henning, and daughter.

DIED: Shamas-ud-Din, 77, former J&K Prime Minister who served as the state's *Sadar-e-Riyasat* from Oct. 1963 to Feb. 1964, at Gojibagh, Srinagar, on 19 April.

OPENED: by Pankaj Roy, former India batsman, the Regent Cricket Academy at the Regent Park Government Housing Estate, Calcutta.

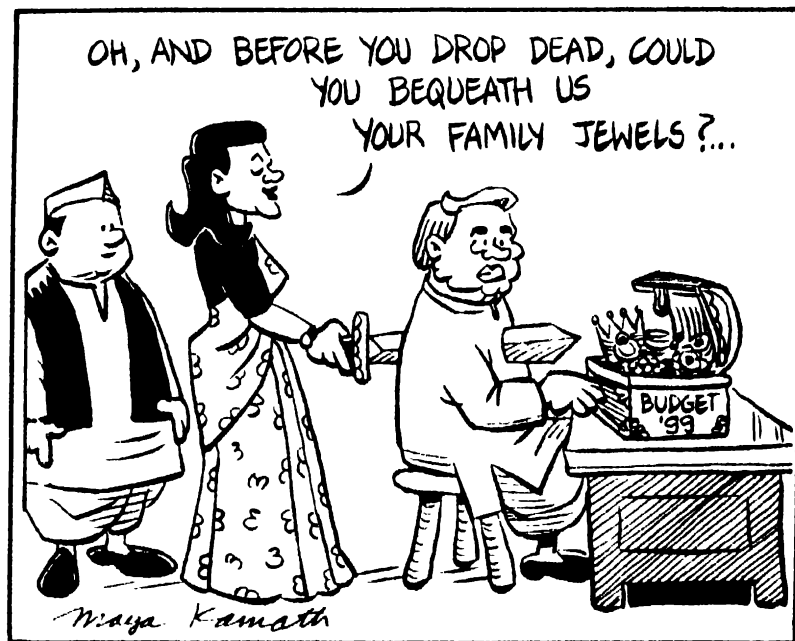


Sponsored by Stracon India, the academy is the first of its kind in the city to have dieticians, psychologists and NIS-trained physical instructors to guide young aspirants.

DIED: O.P. Ralhan, 71, film producer and director, after a heart attack in Bombay on 20 April. Ralhan directed *Phool aur Pathar*, a major box-office hit of the Sixties.

NOMINATED: S.M. Datta, former Hindustan Lever boss, as chairman of Philips India Ltd, a group company of the Netherlands-based Royal Philips Electronics.

SIGHT & SOUND



MAYA KAMATH/THE ASIAN AGE

■ We want Vajpayee. No government without Vajpayee; better have elections then.

MAMATA BANERJEE, Trinamul Congress chief, after Atal Behari Vajpayee offered to step down as leader of the BJP-led coalition

■ Mulayam is my brother and I am confident I can talk him into not bailing the BJP out.

LALOO PRASAD YADAV, RJD chief

■ Migratory birds come in a certain season. As the season comes, they arrive in hordes. The season has started.

ARJUN SINGH, Congress Working Committee member, when asked from where the Congress will get its numbers



■ This book is not about bringing pressure on the team but represents the collective good wishes of millions of Indians.

KAPIL DEV, former India captain, while presenting the Good Luck India book to Mohammed Azharuddin, captain of the Indian 1999 World Cup team

■ Three ladies, Lakshmi, Saraswati and Durga, felled the Vajpayee government.

SUBRAMANIAN SWAMY, Janata Party president, referring to Sonia Gandhi, Jayalalitha and Mayawati

■ I want to play my natural game and leave the rest to the Almighty.

SACHIN TENDULKAR, ace batsman

■ They are definitely not mere adornments. Performances differ. Within the given frame, everyone does their best and it's the filmmaker who has to extract outstanding performances.

RINKE KHANNA, actress, saying that roles played by Bollywood heroines are distinct

In the dock

Now, it has become a trend to criticise the President for his actions



It has been noticed that when a constitutional crisis arises following the fall of a Union government, the President of India immediately comes under the scrutiny of the political

parties as well as the media. In fact, it has become a trend to criticise the President. Not only for his decisions, but for his attitude also.

Keeping in mind this criticism, both Shankar Dayal Sharma and K.R. Narayanan had come out with detailed descriptions justifying their decisions through their official spokesmen. This is a new trend. Earlier, a number of decisions were taken by various Presidents regarding government formation, but they never gave any explanation and nobody expected them to do so.

Every political party criticised Dr Shankar Dayal Sharma when he called Atal Behari Vajpayee to form the government for 13 days. Sharma went by the well-established formula of giving a chance to the single-largest party first, before entertaining other proposals. Later, the BJP criticised the way Gujral was installed after Deve Gowda's ouster. The BJP wanted that Vajpayee be given an opportunity again in between.

Narayanan was criticised when he did not call Vajpayee before taking all the letters from the various allies. This he did because earlier Sharma had been criticised for calling Vajpayee without ascertaining the support. Now in the current crisis the President has been criticised for not taking early decisions and for giving an opportunity to the second single-largest party to muster support.

Moreover, he was criticised for not giving one more opportunity to Vajpayee to prove his majority. On the other hand, the Left Front and the Congress were criticising the President for giving time to Advani to restake claim with a list of 270 MPs. Now, it is very difficult for the President to decide what to do



Narayanan has been at the receiving end from both the sides. After all his final decision is going to please one and upset others. So he has to be criticised for it

and what not to do.

If his actions or postures do not satisfy a particular party, it starts criticising him. If it suits that party, it admires and others criticise him. The poor President is at the receiving end from both the sides. After all his final decision is going to please one and upset others. So, he has to be criticised for it. The political parties are adopting a wrong trend of putting the President in the dock.

After all, sometimes the situation becomes so complicated that the President has to decide favouring one and rejecting others' claims simultaneously. As long as his mind is not prejudiced, he cannot be criticised. Narayanan also issued a long explanation for the delay after a statement by Dr Murli Manohar Joshi.

It was the BJP's apprehension that he would invite Sonia Gandhi without ask-

ing her to submit the letters of support. But he did not do so. Later because of the wider consultation he took time to decide and he was again questioned. This is not done. The President holds the highest office and he must be respected.

In order to deal with this kind of a complicated situation, I would suggest that Rashtrapati Bhavan form an official panel of seven constitutional experts who would advise the President to go by the majority opinion within this panel, if there is no unanimity.

But the ultimate decision should lie with the President and this panel will only be an advisory body and its decision not binding upon the President. The members of the panel should be told not to make their advice public. Otherwise, it will unnecessarily drag the President into political controversies. •



Mussolini marched on the Parliament in Rome and was welcomed with open arms by parliamentarians seeking to dissolve themselves. Hitler was not only popularly elected, he got the Enabling Act — giving him dictatorial powers — passed unanimously by the Reichstag

THE QUEST FOR STABILITY

National government, presidential system or two-front democracy?



The political classes have stopped fantasising about Madhuri Dixit. It is political stability that is the preoccupation of the day. So avid is the desire for stability, that the political classes are willing to consider any solution — even reversal to Congress dynasticism — to escape the roller-coaster ride that our contemporary politics has become. The behaviour of the stock exchange explains, in part,

this yearning for stability. Within three days of the Budget, investors became notionally Rs 40,000 crore richer. They had themselves done nothing — unless you describe wiping the sweat off their brow as "doing". Yet, with no effort on their part, the market value of their assets shot through the ceiling.

Then came the Jayalalitha bombshell — and within the same period of just three days all the lovely Rs 40,000 crore was gone. And as signs of a new government taking office started surfacing, the Sensex began creeping up again — Rs 15,000 crore overnight. Frankly, this kind of casino-economics is no substitute for solid growth, but it panders to the baser instincts of the get-rich-quick class. And gives the cutting edge to their anguished cry for stability.

There are other better reasons to yearn for stability. Prime among them is the need to ensure continuity for our hard-won democracy. If democracy leads only to elections, not governance, democracy itself is jeopardised. In India, we little realise how fragile a flower democracy has been even in 20th century Europe. The word 'dictator' might today have a pejorative connotation, but in the Twenties and Thirties it was accepta-



While a Prime Minister without a majority fades gently into the footnotes of history, a President without a parliamentary majority is likely to order the troops out as presidential dictators from Ayub Khan to Zia-ul-Haq have so vividly demonstrated in our neighbourhood

ble and even politically-correct terminology. Mussolini, for example, marched on the Parliament in Rome and was welcomed with open arms by parliamentarians seeking to dissolve themselves. Salazar agreed to become Prime Minister on the strict condition that there be no interference from Parliament or, indeed, his own Cabinet in his taking Portugal where he, the Dictator, wished. Hitler was not only popularly elected, he got the Enabling Act—giving him dictatorial powers—passed virtually unanimously by the Reichstag, the German Parliament. France lurched through government after government in much the fashion that we are now doing, resulting in a great measure of approbation (now sought to be brushed under the carpet) when the Vichy regime was established as a dictatorship after the German conquest of France in the early days of World War II. Even in Britain, Oswald Mosley and his Black Shirts enjoyed their moment of notoriety demanding an Italian-style fascism for the United Kingdom. Mosley was no street-smart gangster. He belonged to the upper classes. His performance as a young man in the House of Commons was so impressive that he was early marked as a potential Prime Minister. It was his disillusionment with democracy—equated through the Thirties with the Great Depression and the drift to war—that persuaded him of the alternative.

THIS SLICE OF RECENT European history needs to be recalled to stress how fragile is a nascent democracy. And ours is a nascent democracy. We do need stability. It is imperative. At the same time, we need to stand warned against instant panaceas and quack remedies. Otherwise, some Mussolini or Nani Palkhivala will tempt us down a sidlane from which there is no knowing how or when we might escape.

The first nostrum, trumpeted most by former President Venkataraman, now at an advanced stage of his saffron dotage, is

the idea of a national government. The notion is both impractical and inherently undemocratic. A national government is feasible during times of war when the imperative of saving the state from external aggression becomes the overwhelming priority. It might also be required at a time of grave economic crisis, as in Britain from 1931 to 1937 at the depths of the Great Depression. But to tout it as an institutional answer to the shortcomings of the democratic process is to substitute democracy by an oligarchy of politicians.

The essence of democracy is choice, with the choice being made by the people. A national government deprives the people, and the processes of governance, of choice and is therefore inherently undemocratic.

What divides political parties in a democracy is politics, as much the politics of principles and policies as the politics of personalities and parties. Democracy is a dialectic—a clash between the thesis of the government and the anti-thesis of the Opposition, from which emerges the synthesis of nation-building. A national government assumes away an Opposition, it merges those who have received a mandate with those who have not, asks them to sink the differences which constitute the essence of the democratic dialectic, and work together when they ought, in the interests of democracy, to be working against one another. The Venkataraman thesis assumes that differences between the BJP and the Congress are shadow boxing, that there is no real difference of opinion just a jockeying for power among self-interested power-seekers. There is enough that divides and distinguishes the BJP from the Congress to make for a real democratic dialectic. They could, notionally, come together to form a government; they could not stay long together to govern. To do that they would have to drown their respective identities and abandon their respective agendas. That might be possible temporarily in the face of



All the coalitions seen at the Centre, from Morarji Desai's in 1977-79 to Vajpayee's in 1998-99, have been dependent coalitions, not dominated coalitions



external aggression or grave economic crisis, but it can hardly be a normal state of affairs in a democracy.

A senior BJP leader once said to me, when we were together abroad in a somewhat convivial setting: "Mani, the answer to our country's problems lies in a reformed BJP coming together with a reformed Congress." To which I replied: "Surely, a reformed BJP is the Congress!" Running a two-party coalition of matched, and rival, national parties will be fraught with all the problems, and worse, of the kind of multi-party coalitions we have been plagued with in the seven years of non-Congress rule, under seven different coalitions, that we have suffered in 52 years of democratic *swaraj*.

THE ARGUMENT FOR A presidential system to ensure stability is equally flawed. To prevent a presidential system from degenerating into dictatorship, it is essential to check and balance the powers of the executive through the vigilance of Parliament (or Congress, as Parliament is called in American par-

lance). If Parliament, a.k.a. Congress, is at odds with the executive, a.k.a. President, then democratic governance becomes impossible. Indeed, it was when there was a complete breakdown of understanding between Congress and Clinton's White House, leading to a closure of the US government, that Monica Lewinsky brought him a pizza—with all the consequences that followed. An Indian presidential system might not be subject to the Monica syndrome as our potential Presidents are not much given to eating pizza. (Also, our Presidents would not be looking for humidors for their cigars; they don't smoke cigars.)

But our fragmented Parliament is likely to be at odds with an Indian White House almost all the time. A stable President with an unstable Parliament is no better than an unstable Prime Minister with an unstable Parliament; in fact, that would be worse because while a Prime Minister without a majority fades gently into the footnotes of history, as Vajpayee is doing, a President without a parliamentary majority is likely to order the troops out as presidential dictators from Ayub Khan to Zia-ul-Haq have so vividly demonstrated in our neighbourhood. So, very sorry, Palkhivalaji, no Cabinet post for you this time round.

WHICH TAKES US TO the reality towards which Indian democracy is groping its way. The BJP is incapable of ever securing a majority on its own because its inherent extremism is as appealing to its extremist fringe as it is off-putting to the mainstream. When, as under Vajpayee, it seeks to dilute its extremism, it becomes the target of its own *parivar*, as we have seen over the last 13 months. For the BJP to come to office, therefore, it has to become an anti-Congress front led by the BJP. Some partners will come into a BJP-led front only if the BJP moderates its natural extremism. To the extent it does, such a front can pose a credible challenge to the Congress.

The Congress, for its part, still hopes to return to power on its own, but even the most fundamentalist Congressman in this regard will have to concede, as the party did at Pachmarhi, that there are some parts of the country where the Congress has little alternative to tying up with one or the other of the regionals if it is to come within kissing distance of the 50.1 per cent majority of seats required to tide it over the hump. My own state of Tamil Nadu is a prime example of this ineluctable necessity; there may be one or two others. Therefore, pitched against the BJP front is likely to be a front dominated by the Congress.

The difference between the two fronts posited in this thesis, and the rag-tag coalitions one has seen in the past, is that all the coalitions seen at the Centre, from Morarji Desai's in 1977-79 to Vajpayee's in 1998-99, have been dependent coalitions, not dominated coalitions. We have examples of dominated coalitions in state politics: notably the Left Front in West Bengal, Tripura and Kerala, as also the United Democratic Front led by the Congress in Kerala. The future lies in fronts with a dominant partner. The dominant partner will be the party with a national presence. The front partners might well be dominant in their respective regions. It is the coalescing of such fronts that will eventually provide stability with choice — the essence of democratic good governance. It is in this direction that our polity is tending. We must not allow the turbulence this process is presently causing to divert us in the direction of solutions of the Venkataraman/Palkhivala kind. These solutions are no more than asking for the baby to be thrown out with the bath water. •

State of confusion

When will India take a stand on the signing of the CTBT?



As India wrestled with the crisis caused by the defeat of the BJP government, James Rubin, the official spokesman of the US state department earned the dubious distinction of inviting a mild rebuke from the otherwise temporarily paralysed South Block. This he did by lecturing this country that its new government must address not only

Indo-Pak "differences" but also the "international community's non-proliferation demands" on both South Asian countries. That Rubin talked out of turn is not a surprise; that New Delhi pulled him up for his "inappropriate" behaviour surely is. For it was the same gentleman who, though speaking for his government, did use offensive language against this country immediately after the Shakti series of nuclear tests in May last year. He more or less got away with it. When I spoke to a highly respected American journalist about the shocking episode, his reply was; "Please ignore Rubin. He is Madeleine's attack dog."

Even if Rubin doesn't know, his bosses, in particular Strobe Talbott, should that much of the progress made during the Indo-US nuclear dialogue conducted by Talbott and Jaswant Singh, had already been frittered away before the collapse of the BJP-led government. This happened because American officials, including secretary of state Albright, announced prematurely that India had agreed to sign the CTBT. After a series of American declarations to the same effect, Jaswant Singh first and then A.B. Vajpayee had to deny the US claim. Now things can only worsen even though all Indian governments are bound to be conscious of the need to find a meeting ground between America's non-proliferation concerns and this country's imperatives for its nuclear security.

The seeds of future difficulties lie in the state of play between India and the US, on the one hand, and the dangerous escalation of the already debilitating domestic discord in this country, on the other.

Whatever the publicly-stated positions of the two sides before 17 April, the fact remains that the Americans were encouraged to believe that India could be persuaded to put its signatures on the CTBT provided a long enough suspension of American sanctions was also put in place. What was really at issue was the timing of India signing the treaty.

It is no secret that the consistent and persistent American demand has been that the signing should not be delayed until the deadline of 24 September but completed much earlier, preferably by May end. The American rationale for this demand is simple.

Jesse Helms, the extraordinarily powerful chairman of the Senate's foreign relations committee, is determined not to allow the CTBT to go past him to the Senate for ratification. What is more, a very large section of the Senate's membership is also opposed to this treaty. However, the Clinton administration believes that with Indian and Pakistani signatures on the dotted line, it might be possible to circumvent Helms and per-

suaude a bare majority of the Senate.

"Even with Indian and Pakistani signatures," authoritative American sources have repeatedly told me, "the CTBT may not be ratified by the Senate. Without these two signatures the game is lost before it can begin."

What might have happened had the Vajpayee government stabilised itself is no longer relevant. Today, the stark fact is that at no stage did the BJP make any attempt to evolve a consensus on the issue. At one stage, Inder Gujral told Talbott that the BJP government being unwilling or unable to work for consensus had apparently "left this task" to Americans!



Strobe Talbott (left) and Jaswant Singh: much of the progress made during the Indo-US nuclear dialogue conducted by Talbott and Jaswant Singh had already been frittered away before the collapse of the BJP-led government because US officials announced prematurely that India had agreed to sign the CTBT; after a series of American declarations to the same effect, Singh first and then Vajpayee had to deny the US claim

In the changed circumstances, the Indian government cannot be in a hurry to make up its mind. It will first have to talk transparently with all major parties and only then decide. Moreover, as I have had occasion to report, the American side has chosen to take up a hectoring position on even such simple matters as nuclear export controls.

Altogether, the situation has taken a bizarre turn. If the US wants the CTBT to come into force by 24 September, it will have to work for its ratification by its own Senate without any help from India. Even those who earlier saw no harm in signing the treaty are coming round to the view that we must wait for American, Russian and Chinese ratification of the CTBT before announcing our decision. If the US Senate refuses to ratify the treaty, the responsibility for the unravelling of the CTBT would be entirely America's. •

The **GUILTY**
men (and women) of
1999



THE CHARGES

They were Amoral, O

IT WOULD BE ABSURD to say that it was a conspiracy. What could Jayalalitha, Subramanian Swamy, Harkishen Singh Surjeet, Arjun Singh, Mayawati and Amar Singh have had in common to act in concert and bring down the Atal Behari Vajpayee-led government?

But the government did fall. And a weary India has been forced into another general election. Who is responsible for this?

Vajpayee and Advani: the BJP government didn't stand up and defend its principles until it was too late

It could be argued that the BJP must own part of the blame. It was a government run by rank amateurs which didn't stand up and defend its principles until it was too late. If ally Jayalalitha had been jettisoned earlier instead of being appeased, if the BJP had cast aside its arrogance and kept a dialogue with Mayawati open, if it had kept its eyes open and met the Left Front's criticism of it politically, if it had understood the TMC's compulsions and reached out to help them...

It didn't do any of this. And the BJP still hasn't learnt. When the smaller allies pleaded with the party to change its leader, break some party, do *anything* but avoid an election, the BJP was unconcerned. "*Chhoti partiyan ke stakes bhi chhote hotay hain* (Small parties have small stakes)," said a strategist dismissively on hearing of the fears of the smaller allies.

The paradox is that though those who brought the government down did so because they thought they would gain something, no one has, in fact, gained. The BJP has lost a government; the Congress has lost its credibility and must now contest the charge that it is a party of hypocritical power-grabbers who don't believe in their own party resolutions; the Samajwadi Party represents a group of people everyone loves to hate; Jayalalitha and Subramanian Swamy have been exposed as India's most destructive duo; and it will take at least ten years for Mayawati to convince other political parties that she means what she says.

Not a pretty picture.

SUNDAY tells the whole sordid story of how an election was forced on India through the characters who caused it: their arrogance, greed and betrayal.



Fortunists, Dishonest

arjun singh

For a long time, despite pressure from the Congress, Sonia Gandhi resisted bringing down the BJP government, because she believed — rightly — that given time, the BJP would destroy itself and that the Congress didn't really need to intervene in that process.

"But Madam, the BJP will infiltrate the bureaucracy. After the Lahore trip and the Bomb, Vajpayee is slowly becoming unstoppable. If we don't do something now, it may be too late," was the refrain of some Congress leaders. Among them, Arjun Singh.

Quite why Sonia let Arjun Singh take over 10 Janpath is a mystery to most. For a man who was gifted a seat like Hoshangabad on a platter and suffered the ignominy of losing it to an unknown *sardarji* by a margin of 75,000 votes in the last election, Singh was surprisingly vocal about what could and what wouldn't click with the people of India as an election issue.

Congressmen, perceptive to the last, realised that Sonia felt she owed Arjun Singh. After all, the man had spent years in oblivion as the price paid for defying the party leadership and supporting Sonia Gandhi from the inside.

Normally, this wouldn't have been a problem. But Arjun Singh suffers from a major complex. When he's supporting a leader, he makes sure no one else has any access to him or her. So it was with Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, and now, Sonia.

Most Congressmen felt that Singh had just monopolised 10 Janpath as if he owned it. When Jayalalitha withdrew support, he assured Sonia that this was the time to strike: 'I can manage 290 MPs' he said confidently. He would make Sonia Gandhi Prime Minister of India in a twinkling of the eye.

Initially, the party was told that it was not letters of support to the President of India which should be treated as the criterion for calling for an



Many believe, Arjun Singh's appointment as party spokesman was the biggest mistake. Not only was he dealing with the negotiations, he was also the only one briefing the media. The CWC felt no one bothered to consult it any more. Nor would Singh let anyone else give Sonia any advice

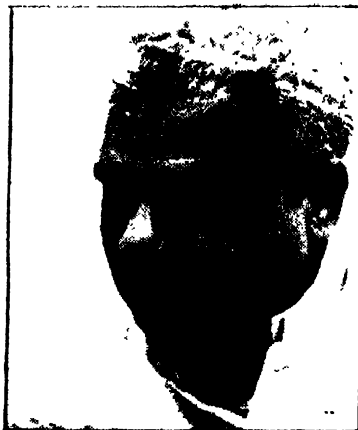


alternative to the BJP: it should be the fact that the Congress was the second-largest party in Parliament.

But there was a fatal flaw in this argument. While inviting the BJP to form the government, the President had demanded letters of support. Not to do so in the case of the Congress would smack of double standard.

So Singh's first theory got knocked out.

Then it was the matter of the letters. It was Sharad Pawar and Bhajan Lal who brought the letters. Arjun Singh could not secure even one. It was Arjun Singh who conducted all the negotiations with Harkishen Singh Surjeet. But Surjeet himself wasn't quite sure how the government could be formed. And Pranab Mukherjee and A.K. Antony were absolutely certain that going with the Left Front would mean suicide in Kerala and West Bengal. They believed Arjun Singh was hastening this process.



Sharad Pawar and Bhajan Lal: they were the ones who brought the letters of support. Arjun Singh could not secure even one

So confident was Singh about getting 290 letters that the Congress president even appointed him the authorised spokesman of the party during the crisis. Those who watched 10 Janpath's moves believe that this was the biggest mistake. Not only was Arjun Singh dealing with the negotiations, he was the only one briefing the media about them as well.

The Congress Working Committee felt it had been supplanted: no one bothered to consult it any more. Nor would Arjun Singh let anyone else give Sonia any advice.

The restiveness among Congress MPs grew so much

that many of them begged the Congress president to talk to them and ascertain for herself what the views of the party were. It transpired that these did not coincide with the views of Arjun Singh — which were the only views Sonia Gandhi was getting.

What did Arjun Singh want? He wanted the Congress to form a government at any cost, because he saw himself as the next chairman of the coordination committee which would have to be set up if the Congress were to form a coalition government.

But far from it, the Congress wasn't even able to sniff at the prospect of forming a government. Much of this was due to Arjun Singh's ambition. The Congress is having to pay for it.

Sonia Gandhi: quite why she let Arjun Singh take over 10 Janpath is a mystery to most



h.s. surjeet

If ever there was one person responsible for leading his own party to the periphery of irrelevance, it is Harkishen Singh Surjeet. Never has the CPI(M) been more discredited in the broad spectrum of mainstream political parties. And Surjeet has to accept the blame squarely.

Mulayam Singh now says bitterly that Surjeet lacked a personal base, a failing which he made up for by trying to build up a following in other parties.

Take the Samajwadi Party. After coexisting for several years and believing they were friends for life, the break was bitter, angry and, ironically, over what was really an internal Left-party matter.

About four days after the government fell, the Left realised that the Congress was not going to get the requisite numbers.

Why was Surjeet so concerned about the Congress? Because after having sought a closer relationship with the party, Surjeet believed he'd made a breakthrough. Few know that Sonia Gandhi has had several meals with Surjeet at his residence since she became Congress president. On one occasion, he apologised to *beti* because the fan in his room wasn't working and Sonia was sweating in the heat.

During the years that he courted Mulayam, when both the SP and the CPI(M) were part of the UF, Surjeet felt he had managed to win the confidence of Mulayam. So much so that Kiranmoy Nanda, an SP MLA in West Bengal, had become a minister in the Left Front government in the state. Surjeet even tried to make Mulayam Singh PM after the Congress withdrew support from the Gujral government.

Those are the kind of favours Surjeet did for the SP.

So, with the Congress on the one hand and the SP on the other, Surjeet believed he had managed to forge the Grand



Why was Surjeet so concerned about the Congress? Few, even in the CPI(M), know that Sonia has had several meals with him at his residence since she became Congress president. On one occasion, he apologised to *beti* because the fan wasn't working and Sonia was sweating in the heat!

Secular Alliance on behalf of the CPI(M) and the Left Front.

But it was all washed away in one week. Surjeet's error was: he rested on his oars and didn't come clean with all those he was dealing with. When the broker himself begins to covet the goods he's been commissioned to sell, there's a problem.

But this was Jyoti Basu's fault, not Surjeet's.

When the Left Front realised that the Congress wasn't going to get the numbers, it decided it was going to have to step in. (A senior Left leader said that the best course

for them would be to wait till 11.59, and just when the President was getting ready to dissolve the House, tell him: 'One minute Mr President. We have Jyoti Basu.') So by no means was Basu the blushing bride about to lose her virginity by becoming the first communist PM of India.

But Surjeet had a larger vision. Jyoti Basu couldn't possibly become part of the squalid farce that a

Congress-supported government would be. It had to be the Congress, with the Left supporting the party from the outside.

But SP didn't want a Congress government. It wanted a coalition government. At Mulayam's residence on 22 April, when this stand was clearly spelt out for the first time (outside support *ka kya matlab hai? Hum bahar baith kar bhajan gayenge?* asked Mulayam Singh graphically), Surjeet was non-plussed. This was an unexpected hurdle.

But he'd already promised Sonia he would instal her as PM. What about that promise? Mulayam told him firmly that if Surjeet had promised Sonia this, it was on his own head.

When Jyoti Basu and others in the CPI(M) realised the way the wind was blowing, they realised that if the BJP had to be kept out, the CPI(M) had to prepare itself to form the government. But only if the Congress failed.

So now there were two tendencies in the CPI(M): the Jyoti Basu tendency which was talking to Mulayam about his support for a Left Front government, supported by the SP; and the Surjeet tendency that either Mulayam or Sonia

should be made PM, but a Left Front candidate for PM was only a theoretical possibility.

For this reason, Surjeet kept telling the CPI(M) that he would prevail upon Mulayam — that Yadav could fall in line and either accept the leadership of the Congress or agree to lead the Third Force. But Kiranmoy Nanda and Amar Singh of the SP had already told Jyoti Basu that he was their candidate because he would be the one to draw maximum people to the alliance: SP and ADMK would give unconditional support, so would Forward Bloc and RSP. The only ones left out would be the TMC.



Jyoti Basu with Surjeet: no blushing bride

They could be persuaded as well.

On Friday, 23 April, politburo member Sitaram Yechury met Jyoti Basu and had a long talk with him. On Saturday, 24 April, an informal meeting of the politburo was held, but no official line was taken on candidature. On Sunday, 25 April, a formal meeting of the politburo was held but at this meeting Surjeet said that the Congress

should propose the name of Basu as the PM they were willing to support, so Jyoti Basu's name never got declared as the official candidate of his party.

Meanwhile, the meeting of the CWC was going on. Pranab Mukherjee and A.K. Antony raised the issue of Surjeet's statement. They pointed out that it was not correct for the Congress to announce a prime ministerial candidate who wasn't even from their party. Surjeet must do it.

He didn't.

Chandan, Jyoti Basu's son, was in Delhi all these days, waiting for some news of his father's elevation. But Sonia Gandhi is a good pupil. According to the lesson taught to her by Surjeet, she obediently repeated that the Congress was not willing to support any party in forming a government except itself.

That was the end of that. Jyoti Basu, the most venerable of all Indian politicians, ended up looking like a fool, reduced to that status by his own party. Surjeet's Grand Alliance lay in a shambles all around him. And because of his obsession with playing kingmaker, India had to face an election.

mayawati

We already know how Mayawati betrayed the BJP government: the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) lulled them into security by offering to abstain, and then stabbed them in the back by voting against the government. It is no secret that Mayawati's 'work', done by some BJP leaders, was a wasted gesture.

However, what is not so well-known is that the BSP also betrayed the Congress.

The BSP realised it was as important to any new government as it had been to the BJP. It held five MPs who were crucial to all formations.

After the BJP government fell, Arif Mohammad Khan was contacted by the Congress. M.L. Fotedar spoke to him. Khan is well-known in 10 Janpath, and Sonia Gandhi also spoke to him.

He made it clear that although on the record the BSP had a position of equi-distance from the Congress and the BJP and would prefer elections, it may not mind backing the Congress if there was something in it for him.

It was Khan who was talking to the Congress, not Mayawati. This is significant.

Khan played the same game with the Congress. He let them believe that the BSP could count on their support. Mayawati assured the Congress the BSP's support — given that all things remained the same — would go to the Congress. But at the same time, no letter went from the BSP to the President, pledging support to a Congress-led minority. To the Congress too, there were only verbal assurances, no letters.

When Salman Khurshid made a tentative statement announcing the possibility of an alliance with the BSP, Mayawati herself contradicted this. "Who said so?" she asked.

So the BSP was operating on two lines. The *rapprochement* was done by Arif Mohammad Khan, the denying was



Mayawati — and Arif Mohammad Khan — knew perfectly well that no government would be formed without their support and that the real aim was to have elections. But what was the harm in negotiating with everyone who wanted to negotiate?

done by Mayawati.

But Mayawati's real quarry was different. She was hounding out Mulayam Singh Yadav. If the SP is on the government, we can't be part of it, she told Congress. The Congress used this in its own way to tell Mulayam that it was his presence on the coalition which was coming in the way of the installation of a secular government at the Centre.

However, Mayawati — and Arif Mohammad Khan — knew perfectly well that no government would be formed without their support and that the real aim was to have elections. But what was the harm in negotiating with everyone who wanted to negotiate?

The only person who got to know the truth was the President of India. When Mayawati met him, she told him that she'd like to keep her options open till the very last moment.

This is nothing new for Mayawati. When she was chief minister of UP in 1997, she went around the state, among the Dalit villages of western UP. She told her supporters that the time had come to seize power. "But do it gently. There is no greater pleasure than committing *halal* on an unsuspecting *murghi*."

Mayawati's own philosophy is simple: "More elections mean more fighting among Manuwadi parties. More elections also mean other parties spend more money. More elections mean that our base will become stronger because our target is not to win more seats. We can never hope to come to power by getting a majority in Parliament. For us, elections are nothing more than a chance to campaign among the Bahujan Samaj and tell them how political parties have fooled them over the years."

Mayawati and the BSP's stock might have risen high among the Dalits with some incendiary statements, but her economy with the truth on the floor of the House has won her no supporters — not among the Congress and not among the BJP. The BSP might get more seats in the next Parliament or it might not. The Congress, despite everything, might enter into electoral alliance with the BSP. But the politics of caste has its limitations. In the short run, it means gains for the Bahujan Samaj. In the long run, it could earn the BSP and Mayawati a reputation which would be difficult to shrug off.



Arif Mohammad Khan: the BSP was operating on two lines. The *rapprochement* was done by Khan, the denying was done by Mayawati



K.R. Narayanan: he was the only person who got to know the truth. Mayawati told him that she'd like to keep her options open till the very last moment



Salman Khurshid: when he announced the possibility of an alliance with the BSP, Mayawati herself contradicted this. "Who said so?" she asked

amar singh

As all big misunderstandings do, this one started out as a small protocol mistake. Samajwadi Party leader Mulayam Singh Yadav's biography was to have been released at a function. He wanted Congress chief Sonia Gandhi to be the chief guest. It would have established the SP's proprietary claims on Mrs Gandhi and indicated to the critics of the SP in the Congress what they could do with their criticism.

Amar Singh, general secretary of the party, offered to do the honours and invite Mrs Gandhi. He sent a fax to 10 Janpath asking for an appointment. Unfortunately, Mrs Gandhi was not free and the appointment could not be granted.

The first 'snub' could have been a coincidence. The second one could have been a mistake. But after several calls not returned and faxes unanswered, Amar Singh concluded that 10 Janpath had a problem with him.

A lot was happening that substantiated this feeling. At Pachmarhi, the Congress said it would not support a coalition government. At the Haridwar meeting, the Congress announced that it would have no truck with casteist, communal and regional parties. Considering that the SP believed it was an ally, this was not the most sensitive position for the Congress to take.

Amar Singh began working on Mulayam as subtly as he could. The campaign ran something like this: the Congress is out to finish the SP in UP. Consider PCC chief Salman Khurshid's statements about us. He refers to us as 'casteist'. No good is ever going to come out of doing deals with the Congress.

In course of time, Mulayam too began to see the logic of what Singh was saying. Arjun Singh's reference to 'migratory birds of passage, who would always return to the Congress' was



From Amar Singh's point of view, the break in the secular alliance was a fight to win respect for the Samajwadi Party. He told Mulayam that faxes and messages were pouring in, congratulating him about the SP's decision to oppose a Congress-alone government

interpreted by the SP as a dismissive reference to itself. The Congress's announcement that it would head a minority government and that all others should support it from the outside, reinforced this view.

The SP found that it wasn't just the Congress which was trying to use it. Amar Singh and Mulayam Singh had been trying to build up a secular alternative against the BJP since 1989. In this, they were joined by the CPI(M) leader Harkishen Singh Surjeet. Surjeet believed that he had a Power of Attorney from Mulayam to negotiate and further this alliance. Amar Singh, who had come to occupy the dominant position in Mulayam's life,

resented this. When he was good enough to handle Mulayam's other matters, why should Surjeet monopolise the politics? The CPI(M)'s patronising manner didn't help.

"Surjeet is just a power-broker. He never told us he was negotiating and what with. We shouldn't rely entirely on him," Amar Singh told Mulayam, who tended to agree.

The break in the relationship — both with the Congress and the Left Front — came on Wednesday, 22 April. Upon realising that Mulayam Singh was not as open to the idea of Sonia Gandhi heading a minority government, Surjeet attempted to bully Amar Singh and Mulayam Singh. Big mistake. Both told him that no one had ever agreed to bow to everything the Congress would dictate — not when they shook the SP's hand by day and abused them by night.

West Bengal chief minister and CPI(M) boss Jyoti Basu was provoked into snapping at Surjeet: "Why don't you ever tell people clearly what you're doing?" An offended Surjeet got up, said he hadn't come to the meeting to be insulted, and walked out of the meeting which was adjourned.

By now, Amar Singh was in command of the situation. Sharad Pawar, Madhavrao Scindia, Ajit Jogi, Kamal Nath, Subbirami Reddy and Kapil Sibal were sent to placate Mulayam. It was too late.

From Amar Singh's point of view, the break in the secular alliance was a fight to win respect for the SP. He told Mulayam that faxes and messages were pouring in, congratulating him about the SP's decision to oppose a Congress-alone government. Amar Singh said Mulayam must be brave and resolute. He cited a Bhojpuri proverb: *Moos motai to kya hoi? Lohra hoi; haathi, ghoda to na hoi* (If a mouse becomes big and fat, at the worst what can it turn into? A rat; but it can never become a horse or an



Mulayam Singh: Amar Singh encouraged him to take more and more hardline stands

elephant.) Similarly, what could the Congress aspire to at best: two per cent of the SP vote? Three per cent? How much could it gain if the alliance broke?

Having broken Surjeet's stranglehold, Amar Singh realised that isolation wouldn't help. He now got Mulayam to endorse Jyoti Basu's name for prime ministership 'with unconditional support from our party' knowing full well that the CPI(M) would reject the proposal. He was in constant touch with Somnath Chatterjee and Basu (having hosted a dinner for them), reassuring them that they had his support.



Deve Gowda: Amar Singh had tutored Mulayam into agreeing that they must have a PM they could control. Their choice was Deve Gowda

But by now, Amar Singh had tutored Mulayam into agreeing that they must have a PM they could control. Their choice was H.D. Deve Gowda. They hoped the rest of the 'secular alliance' would reach the same conclusion after all the intermediate candidates had been rejected.

It didn't happen. Amar Singh decided his self-respect was most important. He encouraged Mulayam to take more and more hardline stands. So an election was foisted on India. •

S. Swamy

There are some people who bring out the best in everyone. What is it about this man that brings out the worst in everyone? Consider his role since he became a member of this Lok Sabha. The ADMK and BJP fought an election in alliance. Whether it was because of this alliance, or because of his own dubious connections, Subramanian Swamy won the Madurai Lok Sabha seat and found himself back in the fold which had rejected him more than 15 years ago.

Anyone else would have tried to put the past behind them and forge on ahead. But when he tried to secure the finance minister's post for himself and A.B. Vajpayee baldly rejected this (Vajpayee has personal experience of Swamy's politics: he was a victim of the latter's slanderous campaign in the 1970s), Swamy distanced himself from the alliance, and began poisoning Jayalalitha's ears.

It was a campaign of unadulterated disinformation. It was this very Jayalalitha against whom Swamy had initiated a vicious campaign while she was CM of Tamil Nadu. Now, when she found herself helpless in getting what she wanted from the Vajpayee government, Swamy egged her on to demolish the central government.

One day, it was information that the BJP was trying to get her cases reopened. The other, it was that her ministers were not passing on everything they had to her. ADMK MPs and ministers just watched helplessly as Swamy spun his web and worked his telephone.

It seemed ridiculously easy to manipulate Jayalalitha, although she will deny this. No one could figure out exactly when George Fernandes, with whom Jayalalitha had a comfortable relationship, fell from favour. But those on the inside trace the deterioration of the relationship to some time last year.



Swamy has proved that his politics is based on half-truths and threat of slander. When the BJP government quit office and there was a slender chance that an alternative could be forged, he wrecked it by playing one party off against the other

MDMK leader Vaiko's son got married last year. He needed some money. He went to Fernandes for help. Fernandes told him he had no money, but arranged some. Swamy got to know of this and began telling Jayalalitha that here was the evidence that the BJP was propping up those who opposed her and were friendly with the LTTE. Not only was George Fernandes out to marginalise her politically but was even consorting with known enemies to have her taken out.

Fernandes, oblivious to this, continued to believe Jayalalitha trusted him. He hadn't reckoned with Swamy. The argument used was that Fernandes had done deals, made a lot of money himself, and was farming it out to opponents of Jayalalitha. So she should put him in a spot too.

Which is why the Vishnu Bhagwat case, the reason Jayalalitha withdrew support from the Vajpayee government, was made such an issue. Jayalalitha has no interest in the Navy, doesn't know Bhagwat, had no idea what the case was all about. But it was a way to embarrass Fernandes. Why? Because Swamy explained to her that Fernandes was her enemy.

No wonder Fernandes found her cool and curt when he went to meet her with the Bhagwat files. He had earlier invited her to his home to "have a meal with me and play with my dogs and puppies" and she'd laughed and said she would love to come. But how could he have known that Swamy had got a chance to do his work in between?

There were scores of incidents like this. For the last six months, Swamy has been telling people in different political parties with all the conviction he could command, that the BJP government was about to fall. This would not have created such a psychosis: but everyone knew that if Jayalalitha pulled out, the government would indeed fall; and that if Swamy was saying so, it was probably true, because he was in control of Jayalalitha.

The crowning glory of Swamy's campaign was to get Sonia Gandhi to his famous tea party at which Jayalalitha was present. This was to show the BJP (which hadn't invited him to their tea party a day before) that he merely had to snap his fingers and political leaders of all parties would come running.

Having demonstrated this, it was a bit galling when Jayalalitha called on Sonia Gandhi later, asking only that



George Fernandes: Jayalalitha had no interest in the Bhagwat case but it was made into an issue because Swamy explained to her that Fernandes was her enemy

Swamy be made minister and Mrs Gandhi was non-committal in her response. Later, when Arjun Singh came to meet Jayalalitha, he told her bluntly that Swamy shouldn't even think about being in government.

This made Swamy furious. It was bad enough not being able to become minister in the BJP-led government in which ADMK was an ally. (He himself met Vajpayee six times and begged to be made a minister. Vajpayee, who is quick to forgive, merely laughed each time). But who was Arjun Singh to say this?



Jayalalitha: It was ridiculously easy for Swamy to manipulate her, although she will deny this

So Swamy has now written to the President of India, asking him to investigate Arjun Singh's role in a Libyan terrorist scam which, according to him, also involves a former cabinet secretary.

Subramanian Swamy has proved that he runs his politics on the basis of half-truths, disinformation and threat of slander. When the BJP government quit office and there was a slender chance that an alternative could be forged, he wrecked it by playing one party off against the other. There is nothing that terrifies a politician more than the idea that there might be a conspiracy brewing against him which he doesn't know about. Swamy played on this fear.

Given his current relationship with Jayalalitha, he will probably win his seat. But the question is whether anyone in the next Parliament will have anything to do with him.

jayalalitha

The last word on Jayalalitha has not been written yet. She tried hard to prove her sincerity and her bona fides in trying to forge an alternative to the Congress.

But finally, when nothing seemed to be coming out of it, she had to break down and sob at the residence of Mulayam Singh Yadav on 22 April: "Please, please, listen. We have to find an alternative. It is a question of my life!"

It is hard to see who the bigger culprit is: Jayalalitha, who tried to twist the laws in her favour and when they wouldn't yield, tried to change them; or the BJP, which allowed itself to be bullied, threatened and blackmailed by her for one year, until it finally broke off with her.

It was Ram Jethmalani, minister for urban development, who brought to light exactly how demanding Jayalalitha had been and how much the BJP had sunk in trying to appease her. Apparently, the BJP agreed to have a part-heard case in a competent court transferred to a court chosen by Jayalalitha herself, to prevent the case getting any further. All that this required was a notification, which the BJP government agreed to issue as the price for keeping Jayalalitha happy.

In other words, the BJP went along with her in selecting the court which should hear her cases, so that the judgement was in her favour.

The noose around Jayalalitha is beginning to tighten already. Efforts to stave off imminent arrest have not been successful. The Madras High Court has already asked her to move the special court which is handling her cases, for an evaluation of her valuables which are in the custody of the court. The wealth tax authorities have refused to accept an appraisal done by the customs department.

So it is imperative for Jayalalitha to have a government which listens to her so that the issue of her cases can be



The noose around Jayalalitha is beginning to tighten already. It is imperative for her to have a government which listens to her so that the issue of her cases can be resolved and she gets some breathing space. It isn't important whose government it is



Sonia Gandhi: Jayalalitha was ready to accept her though she insisted on being part of the government



Jyoti Basu: Jayalalitha believed that the CPI(M) needed her and would listen to her



Ram Jethmalani: it was he who brought to light how much the BJP had sunk in trying to appease Jayalalitha

resolved and she gets some breathing space. For her, it isn't important whose government it is — she was ready to accept Sonia Gandhi, though she insisted on being part of the government; she was ready to accept Jyoti Basu because she believed the CPI(M) needed her and would listen to her; she was even ready to accept an unnamed Third Front leader if that ensured her safety.

In many ways, Jayalalitha was the only politician who didn't want an election and was prepared to compromise to any extent to prevent this. But now that elections have been declared, there is more hard work ahead. She has to appear to be credible and forge an alliance so that she doesn't land in the same soup again. However, this is easier said than done. Jayalalitha has a short memory about the damage she has done to others. But no one forgets easily. Having disrupted one Lok Sabha, it now remains to be seen how successfully she will disrupt the next. All because the state wants her to pay her dues and she won't. •

Aditi Phadnis with Priya Sahgal/New Delhi and Sreedhar Pillai/Madras

A blot-on-the-copybook President?

K.R. Narayanan is the most controversial President of India since Giani Zail Singh

Atal Behari Vajpayee was addressing a rally in New Delhi when a slip was handed to him. It was a message from his principal secretary saying that the President wanted to see him at 8.40 pm. Since Sonia had visited Rashtrapati Bhavan that evening and informed K.R. Narayanan that she did not have the numbers to form an alternative government, there was much speculation about the reason for the visit.

More so, when the Prime Minister's aides recalled that when Sonia was asked what she would do if the President invited Vajpayee to stake claim, she had replied that she would go by the decision of the President. Then, maybe Narayanan would give Vajpayee another chance. After all, he had indicated as much to a delegation led by foreign minister Jaswant Singh which called on the President.

But Narayanan did nothing of the sort.

He first informed Vajpayee that no other party had been able to come up with a viable alternative. And spent the next half-hour explaining to the PM what each party had said to him (that's something Vajpayee already knew from the press, but nevertheless, he listened patiently). Then, Narayanan abruptly ended the conversation saying that since there was no other way out, the Prime Minister would have to hold a Cabinet meeting the next day and recommend dissolution of the House. A startled Vajpayee said nothing except that he would like the elections to be held as early as possible.

Later, when the press asked him why he had not asked the President for another chance, the Prime Minister simply said, "The facts were before the President."

But Vajpayee is not the only one who left Rashtrapati Bhavan in a huff. According to Congress sources, when Sonia

Gandhi called on him to inform him that she could not form an alternative government, the President showed her the file on Bofors which had been forwarded to him for his approval earlier in the year.

He reminded Sonia that the BJP had asked him for permission to prosecute Madhavsingh Solanki and S.K. Bhatnagar (with Rajiv Gandhi as Accused C) in the Bofors case. The only way of avoiding this was to have a government which would listen to Sonia Gandhi. The President suggested that if she had difficulty in finding the numbers, why not ask Jyoti Basu, who was able, willing and had acceptability? The Congress could support from the outside.

Sonia was a little shaken and also a little angry at this. For one thing the threat of the Bofors prosecution had been used to bring down the government. But it was a bit too much to use it as a stick to install a Prime Minister. Anyway, the Congress launched into an ostentatious exercise to get to know its MPs' mind and announced that it would not support a Third Front candidate, be it Jyoti Basu or anyone else. So that was the end of that.

But it was too late. Questions were already being raised about the role of the President in the making and unmaking of Prime Ministers. It is no exaggeration to say that K.R. Narayanan has become the most controversial President of India after Zail Singh. Whether as infamous as Zail Singh, only time can tell.

This is the result of an aggregate of events which have taken place over the last one year. From the time when the President deviated from precedent and instead of the customary State of the Nation address on Independence Day, chose to grant an interview on Doordarshan.

While the idea was probably innovative and imaginative, the journalist Rashtrapati Bhavan chose to grant the

interview to is known to be opposed to the BJP. So, the council of ministers was justifiably irritated that the President should go out of his way to establish his independent political credentials.

This was quickly followed up by other blots on the copybook. In theory the President is the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. The issue of dismissing the Chief of Naval Staff was discussed with him at every stage. If he had wanted to help, he could have endorsed the government's action. Instead the Rashtrapati Bhavan's doors were open to the good admiral and his wife, to complain against the government of the day.

The President made no secret of his dislike of the BJP government and its ways: he criticised it none too subtly, publicly, leading many to ask incredulously whether they were reading him correctly — was he setting himself up as a proxy Prime Minister?

Many have pointed out that the vote of confidence and now the election could easily have been avoided if the President had heeded the logic of Parliament. It was a Budget session and the government of the day could have been toppled any time by the Opposition through the simple expedient of voting against a Finance Bill in the Lok Sabha. If he was so passionately convinced that the BJP government had to go, this would have been the right opportunity. To call for a vote of confidence was unfair.


And the gentleness shown to Sonia Gandhi and the Left? Does this befit the President who is the first citizen for all the citizens of India equally? The Congress contests this. It says, rather contemptuously, that the BJP gives rather too much credit to the President — a man who didn't give a single ruling during his entire term as Vice-president and chairman of the Rajya Sabha can't possibly have developed a spine overnight and be seen to favour one or the other party. It goes against the grain.

The President of India, like all other human beings, has only two eyes and two hands. But the people of India have 100 crore pairs of eyes and 100 crore pairs of hands. They are watching and they will vote. •



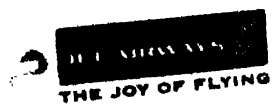
Y. PALACIOS





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Saifuddin Soz makes an adroit attempt to carve out a constituency for himself among Indian Muslims

The one vote which stunningly brought down the BJP-led coalition government at the Centre was undoubtedly that of Saifuddin Soz. Had he gone by his party line and cast his vote in favour of the trust motion of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, the BSP's loquacious leader Mayawati's artful dodge from a courteous donor to a vindictive villain could have made the least difference.

Soz said that his defiance of the party directive was at the call of his conscience. "We don't have the mandate of our people to support the BJP government. My voters, Kashmiri Muslims, can hold their heads high now that they have shown the way and participated in throwing communalists out of power," the demolition man said triumphantly after Vajpayee lost the vote of confidence.

Soz gave three reasons for going against the party diktat: 1. The people of J&K have not voted National Conference to back a communal party, 2. Indian Muslims should feel comfortable and participate in selecting and electing governments at the Centre and 3. J&K joined India for secularism and the party representing the state cannot compromise on its basic ideals built on the edifice of secularism.

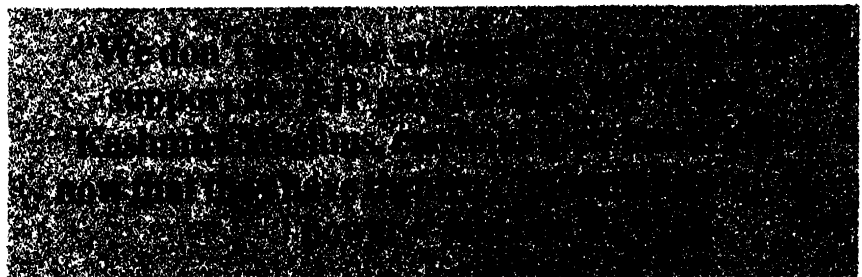
National Conference, by its claim and character, is all the more secular. The party's founder, late Shaikh Mohammad Abdullah, NC leaders recall, spurned Jinnah's two-nation theory and joined India for secular ideals. It has a long history of ideological conflict and bitterness with religious parties, both Muslim and Hindu. Its relations with religion-based Hindu parties had been strained ever since Hindu Mahasabha leader Shyama Prasad Mukherjee died at a Srinagar jail under Shaikh Abdullah's regime.

However, when Farooq Abdullah last year sided with the BJP and bailed it out during the crucial trust motion by ordering his three MPs to abstain from voting, it stunned many people in and outside the party.

Call of conscience



ASHOK VAHIE



That time too, Soz publicly differed, though briefly, with his boss. Abdullah air-dashed two Cabinet ministers to Delhi who persuaded, more appropriately pressurised, Soz to toe the party line. He verily fell in line but not before paying a price. He was removed from the position of the party's chief spokesman.

On 17 April, when he again resisted the party's decision to extend outright support to the BJP, he was made to pay a heavier price. He was expelled from the party.

The National Conference leadership is not ready to buy Soz's "conscience theory" and is questioning the morality of his move. "If he [Soz] had got to act according to his conscience, he should have resigned the day the party allied with the BJP and sought a fresh mandate from the people on his own," argues a senior minister and party leader.

He is being accused of according precedence to himself over the party. "Party is supreme not the person," said NC general secretary Shaikh Nazir Ahmad. Another leader called his move "political infidelity" while one more described it as "betrayal".

The NC leadership has its own explanation for siding with the BJP. When chief minister Farooq Abdullah deserted the United Front last year and extended its support to the BJP-led government, he contended that Jammu and Kashmir, with little resources, largely depended on central assistance. "We cannot afford confrontation with the Centre as we need their help and assistance," he argued.

Another section of the leadership viewed the BJP as a "lesser evil", while admitting that ideologically it is poles apart from the NC. "But it [the BJP] was never a party to New Delhi's intrigues against the National Conference in the past 50 years," said a senior NC minister.

He referred to the toppling of the Shaikh Abdullah government in 1953, withdrawal of support to his minority government by the Congress in 1977, dethroning Farooq Abdullah in 1984 and the appointment of Jagmohan as J&K Governor which led to Farooq Abdullah's resignation. "Every time one or the other Congress leader was the architect," he said, describing Soz's move as "yet another Congress intrigue against National Conference."

But Soz on his part claimed that by voting against the BJP he had upheld the legacy of Shaikh Abdullah. "I will con-

sider myself lucky if I am able to carry forward and strengthen this legacy," he said.

Observers, however, believe that there is much more than meets the eye. Of all the Kashmiri politicians, Soz has had the longest stay in New Delhi. In 1983, he left behind a long career as academician, first as professor of economics, then as secretary, Board of School Education, and joined politics to become MP on a National Conference ticket

When Farooq Abdullah deserted the United Front he argued that J&K, with little resources, could not "afford confrontation with the Centre"

from the Baramullah-Kupwara seat.

He later became a member of the 8th and 9th Lok Sabhas, besides being a member of the Rajya Sabha in 1996-97. His intellectual deliberations brought him close to the Left and secular parties and personalities. At the same time, he is close to the Muslim community and leadership throughout the country.

This has earned him respect and favour as a 'senior Muslim intellectual-politician with established secular credentials'. "It was unlikely of him to compromise on his integrity," remarked one of his friends. "It was self-denial of him to side with the BJP. He has a deep and honest commitment," he added.

There is also a growing impression that Soz's parting of ways with the NC has more to do with the party's losing lustre than with any other factor. Once an overwhelming voice of the Kashmiri people, it is at the lowest ebb of its popularity.

The NC not only lost its Anantnag stronghold to the Congress's Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, but had just managed to win Srinagar and Soz's Baramullah constituencies in the 1998 Lok Sabha elections. Its poor performance has led to its further alienation from the people. The slogan of autonomy, which has been its main plank in the 1996 Assembly elections, has failed to lure the people.

The party has been changing colours



PRADIP SANYAL

with every change of government at the Centre. It now sees devil with every person who is out of power in New Delhi. This perception got credence when Farooq Abdullah joined hands with the Congress in 1987 and became chief minister.

Abdullah allied with the United Front in 1996 only to curse the Congress for all the "ills and kills" in the country. However, when a BJP-led alliance assumed office in New Delhi last year, the NC leadership found it full of virtues. Omer Abdullah, the chief minister's MP son, indicated that the party would not hesitate to support the Congress if it came to power again.

Soz's move in this backdrop is seen as his adroit attempt to carve out a political constituency for himself among Indian Muslims. It won't be surprising if he pulls through. •

Rashid Ahmad/Srinagar



The

Benazir Bhutto is sentenced for five years imprisonment on charges of corruption

JUDGEMENT

Benazir Bhutto has earned a rare but dubious distinction in the history of our part of the world. She is the first major political leader, indeed a former Prime Minister to boot, to be convicted of corruption in not just Pakistan but the entire Indian subcontinent where corruption is rampant, flagrant and seemingly unstoppable.

Nearly a decade ago, Emma Duncan, then *The Economist's* South Asia correspondent, had recorded, quoting Pakistani bankers and businessmen: "In the matter of corruption, India is small shift, compared with Pakistan." Since then graft and loot have increased alarmingly in this country and exponentially in Pakistan.

And yet such is the political culture and the judicial process of the subcontinent that though scores of the high and mighty, after being dislodged from power, have been prosecuted over the years, not one has been actually brought to book. Cases drag on and fizzle out. Meanwhile, the arraigned politicians deftly use the political system, often by returning to power, to

defeat the ends of justice. In this country, much more than in Pakistan or Bangladesh, there seems to be a conspiracy among political foes to protect one another.

There had to be someone to break this pernicious pattern, and Benazir Bhutto it is. Her sentence of five years in prison, along with disqualification for public office for the same period and a hefty fine, is thus well and truly a major landmark. It is no accident that along with her husband, Asif Zardari, already in jail, has also been awarded the same punishment. If she herself is not behind bars, it is because she is away in London. After first announcing aggressively that she was returning home immediately to "expose" and "fight" those who had wreaked vengeance on her by convicting her of "false and fabricated" charges, she has since postponed her homecoming.

Evidently, for fear of arrest. All applications for bail to her are being moved in the Supreme Court where Benazir will later file an appeal against the judgement of the Ehtsab Accountability Bench of the Lahore High Court. But the

federal law minister has already started saying that for the apex court to grant her bail, she would have to appear personally.

Neither Benazir's protestations of innocence nor the tactics of the government headed by her main tormentor, Nawaz Sharif, are new or novel. Both are in fact entirely in keeping with the well-established practice all across the subcontinent. Benazir's cries of innocence and vendetta are no different from what Jayalalitha has been claiming about the 26 corruption cases against her or from Laloo Yadav's contemptuous dismissal of the Rs 950-crore fodder scam.

More importantly, as in the cases of Jayalalitha and Laloo in this country, devoted supporters and followers of Benazir in Pakistan, running into hundreds of thousands, are convinced that their leader is being "framed" by a "vile" government. No wonder then that she is planning to fight the Sharif govern-

access to the foreign bank account opened by Asif Zardari through a complicated money laundering arrangement. She is alleged to have taken out 92,000 pound from this account to buy a necklace that has been displayed on TV screens across the world. This, incidentally, is only one of the many charges of corruption against her. But this is the first on which she has been nailed by the high court though the Supreme Court is yet to hear the appeal.

Leaving aside the unthinking supporters of the rival sides, there are a large number of Pakistanis who can be trusted to take a more or less objective view. Most of them believe that with or without Benazir's connivance, Zardari must have taken the money from the Swiss firm. It is not for nothing that he is called "Mr Ten Per Cent". Indeed, Zardari's "gift of the grab" is said to be legendary, compared with which even



Asif Zardari

Pakistani liberals are greatly concerned that having wrested the highest judiciary, the presidency and even the army, Nawaz Sharif has already become the most powerful and dictatorial Prime Minister of Pakistan ever



Nawaz Sharif

ment not only in the Supreme Court but also in the streets. She has planned a countrywide agitation and she is highly skilled in this art.

However, she is also giving an ethnic twist to her no-holds-barred fight against Nawaz Sharif. From London she gave a call for a general strike confined only to Sindh. On the ground that Sharif was trying to destroy Sindh's tallest leader to perpetuate the domination of a Punjabi coterie, headed by Nawaz or rather his father, "Abbaji", who is said to have become as powerful as the army and the Americans. The Sindhis responded to her call to a man. Isn't there a message in this that should cause some foreboding in Pakistan, especially in view of the fact that Sindh has been the nerve-centre of one of the most vicious ethnic and sectarian conflict?

The charge on which Benazir has been punished relates to a kickback of \$4.3 million received by her and her husband from Societe Generale de Surveillance (SGS). A Swiss firm to which, as Prime Minister, she had awarded a contract of nearly \$138 million. The court has held that Benazir had

Mobutu's loot in Zaire pales into insignificance. But the massive government contract, giving the Swiss firm a monopoly of overseeing Pakistan's customs service, could not have been cleared quickly without Benazir saying so.

In spite of this, there is much sympathy for Benazir. For two reasons. First, that in the perception of most Pakistanis the Sharif family is no less corrupt than the Bhuttos. And although during her days in power, Benazir did try to destroy the industrial conglomerate Ittefaq, owned by the Sharifs, she never went so far as the present regime has done.

Secondly, and more importantly, many Pakistanis feel that the Ehatsab system of justice, tailored by Sharif, and presided over by his crony, Senator Saifur Rahman, is being used selectively and tendentiously. Pakistani liberals are greatly concerned that having wrested the highest judiciary, the presidency and even the army, Sharif has already become the most powerful and dictatorial Prime Minister of Pakistan ever. Should he succeed in hounding Benazir out of politics, Sharif's unbridled power could become a major problem for Pakistan. •

Indar Malhotra/New Delhi

A MOTHER AND HER DAUGHTER'S COVENANT OF PHILANTHROPY

Recently, both **Sonia Gandhi** and her daughter **Priyanka** were at their philanthropic best. Cynics, of course, will read deeper motives. Fortunately, they are few in number. So, if they say that mother and daughter were not inspired by pure altruism, we say it wasn't entirely self-serving either. A summary:



RAJESH KUMAR

Name: Sonia Gandhi

Profession: Politician

Portfolio: Congress party president

Main appeal: Sphinx-like enigma; wife of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty

Latest instance of generous humanity: Bridal gifts for a Chamoli earthquake victim

Details:

On 17 April, Rajendra Singh Rawat had an unexpected visitor in his makeshift tent: former MP Satpal Maharaj who handed over ornaments, a bridal dress, a dinner set and cash. Maharaj said they were from Sonia Gandhi. The gifts were for his daughter's wedding which had been postponed to 25 April

Name: Priyanka Vadra

Profession: Social worker?

Portfolio: Too early to have any

Main appeal: Dignifiedly stunning; resembles her paternal grandmother

Latest instance of generous humanity: helping fire victims in Jungpura, South Delhi

Details:

The fire broke out early on 19 April. By 1.30 pm, she was there helping with the relief work and chatting with the kids. "I am a volunteer with Mother Teresa's home here and a regular visitor," she said. "When I heard about the incident, I came to help the sisters and look after the children"



CONCLUSION: You can't deny, it's all there in the genes

Twenty-two women trapped in a desert country in virtual slavery. Enter two actresses with a social conscience. They learn about their plight, rescue them from their evil masters and send them back to India. Seems like a plot for a movie? Only, it's real. The details: The real-life crusaders, **Rekha** and **Suhani**, were in Kuwait recently for a cultural programme when they chanced upon these women. A little probing revealed a familiar tale: they

WOMEN OF SUBSTANCE



RASHBEHARI DAS



RASHBEHARI DAS

had been lured away with the promise of higher wages to work as maidservants but now were being held back against their will. The problem was how to get them out of the country safely. The two actresses then took the help of the Tamil Nadu government and the Indian Women's League and had them transported back to India.

So, happy ending to a noble mission. Unfortunately, things don't always work out that way. We'd have been happier if they caught the culprits.

LEAVE ME ALONE!

When a perfectly placid guy begins reacting violently to journalists, something has to be wrong. Some time ago, film actor Anupam Kher slapped a reporter from a film magazine for writing derogatory stuff about him. It created a stir. Now he says a woman journo is 'stalking' him. Apparently, embarrassing fax messages, blank calls and mushy billets-doux are making life hell for our hero. The lady (she's a freelancer so no publication's claimed responsibility for her action) has interviewed him several times over the last few months and once even called



him over for lunch. Kher, not wanting to appear discourteous, had agreed. The midday tryst had one obvious fallout: the besotted lady poured her heart out, telling Kher that she was willing to give up everything to be with him. Kher reacted by going to the police. Watch this space for updates.

ACHIEVER SON

While papa was in Delhi winning over politicians, the son was in Bombay getting awards. Last week, SUN TV boss Kalanidhi Maran, son of DMK heavyweight Murasoli Maran, was presented the Young Business Achiever award. Instituted by the New York-based Worldcom Group, a consortium of independently-owned PR counselling firms, the award means he'll now compete with other below-40 global entrepreneurs for the World Young Business award at Lisbon. The PR firm conducting the contest in India is Sista's.



DATING IS AN ART

When battle-hardened pros wax romantic, even as common a thing like taking your girlfriend out can be the stuff of poetry. Leander Paes, Indian tennis' prime musketeer, was asked by sports scribes what his idea of a perfect date was. Paes' reply was a transcontinental pastoral idyll: pick up a picnic basket, saddle two horses and ride into the hills near Quebec, Canada, from where his girlfriend Vicky Lavee hails. "We would ride alongside a stream, lay out the basket and the rest would be history," said Leander. To



Vicky Lavee

complete this love-enchanted heaven, he would put on slow rhythm and blues mixed with reggae.

Leander's alter-ego and doubles-partner Mahesh Bhupathi turned out to be more of a 20th-century beau with a preference for chauffeur-driven limos and swanky restaurants with miles and miles of wonderful view. Asked how he would ideally love to spend time with girlfriend Sonali Bendre, Bhupathi said, "I'd send a limo to pick her up, take her to this restaurant which I would



Leander and Bhupathi

then take over just for us, have great music and wine and dine her with only the finest food and liquor. And just before we leave, the finale would be a performance by Placido Domingo."

Advice to young girls: next time you are out on a date, you know exactly what to ask for.



Sonali Bendre

THE MARKETING OF WORLD CUP '99

HOWZAT

It is a battle out there, and not just with the bat and ball. Corporates are playing a tournament of their own, much before the real one begins. The reward being eyed by each firm is that the promotional activities before and during the World Cup will create a high-recall value. That should translate into sales. Shouldn't it? The companies are hopeful, which explains the enthusiasm over unbridled expenditure. Yet, there can be a slip between the Cup and the Wish. And, the slips are showing.

Players in action

The global partners of the World Cup are NatWest, Vodafone, Pepsi Cola and Emirates. The official suppliers are Bulmers, Hero Honda, LG Electronics, Outspan, *Telegraph* and Daewoo. While that is an attractive list of players, those left out are desperate for spots. According to Michael Browning, member, English Cricket Board (ECB): "All global partners and official suppliers will be identified with advertising in programmes, perimeter and upper-level advertising boards. Global partners will also feature on logo

mats and tri-vision [sight screens]. They will also variously feature on welcome boards and other literature. The attention this one is getting is indicative of the stature this event is achieving as one of the world's great international events."

The hype is unlike ever before. The stakes are high. Just television coverage by ESPN-Star Sports, Doordarshan (India), PTV (Pakistan), BTV (Bangladesh) and EAP (Sri Lanka) is enough to lure the companies. The event will achieve a surplus of close to 30 million pounds to be distributed between the International Cricket Council (the competing teams and associates) and the England and Wales Cricket Board (the organisers).

Deepak Jolly, vice-president, corporate communications, Pepsi, proudly discusses his official status as one of the global partners. Says he: "Ours was the first promotion of the World Cup. We have introduced one million people in 20 cities to the event. The concept is all about winning the consumer — through music, through movies and, above all, through the game of cricket."

After the Cola War, one significant development has been the battle between Korean giants like Samsung and LG. World Cup stars of the 1983 team have emerged out of retirement to market their products. Kapil Dev is terrorising natives with larger-than-life pictures of Samsung's lion. Long after playing their last World Cup match, Roger Binny, Madan Lal and Mohinder Amarnath tell the viewer from time to time: Join Me (or LG).



• The Pepsi World Cup concerts have been a superhit in 20 cities all over India

Stumping the consumer?

Consumers are being enticed with freebies, discounts, surprise gifts and contests with truly tempting prizes. New models are being launched, road shows are being conducted and good luck events are being held — all in the hope of creating a recall value in the minds of the consumers. Explains Ruchika Batra, senior manager, corporate communications, Samsung: "For the



consumer electronics industry, it is a big selling opportunity. Our investment in this World Cup is based on the investment made in the soccer World Cup last year, where the result was an immense increase in sales despite the fact that the game is largely confined to three states. Sales grew by 25 per cent after that promotion in the second quarter. So we assume the same kind of success in associating ourselves in this World Cup. In terms of TV sales, we are



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SAMSUNG

SURE SHOT

WORLD CUP BONANZA





RUCHIKA BATRA: "For the consumer electronics industry, it is a big selling opportunity"

expecting a growth of 45 per cent. In terms of turnover, we are expecting a growth of 55 per cent in quarter two, as compared to quarter one. In terms of overall turnover, we are expecting to reach Rs 900 crore as compared to Rs 540 crore in the last financial year, which is approximately 67 per cent growth."

All marketing activities are based on the hope of the positive impact. For them it is an investment in brand equity development. As for results, many are keeping their fingers crossed. Says Rajeev Karwal, vice-president, marketing, LG Electronics: "I agree that for brands which are at saturation level in terms of market share, it is a risky strategy. But brands like us which are not there yet and whose sales are increasing month after month can't be losers. Even the cancellation of the World Cup tomorrow cannot undo our efforts."

But is such optimism warranted? Or will it be a case of too many players in a lost match? Vinod Tiwari, Britannia Industries, justifies: "There is certainly a great deal of clutter during the telecast of matches. This is one of the reasons why innovations such as the 50-50 Third Umpire is used by us to break through the clutter and carve a niche for

ourselves. We therefore complete the circuit of the consumer [promo in the marketplace], the player [Britannia bats for four players] and the game [product association like 50-50]. Mere spots are only half-effective."

But can they all laugh their way to the banks? Marketing consultants are not too optimistic. Says Suhel Seth, MD, Equus: "I think it is stupid. There has to be some synergy between your brand and the World Cup. I can understand the television companies doing it, I can understand apparel companies doing it, but I can't see any relevance between Hero Honda and the World Cup. Every bizarre guy is coming and saying that, you know, we are endorsing the World Cup. In this clutter, will any brand be remembered?"

What we are witnessing is a crowd. And, what might be really tough to remember is a single distinct face in it. Moreover, the strategy of most companies is clearly misdirected. They are only trying to promote the World Cup that is being promoted by sports channels anyway. Some mileage will definitely be achieved but not in the case of products that are not related to sports directly. Brands need to deliberate on the cost-efficacy and cost-efficiency of such promotional activities.

Official Motorcycle



HERO HONDA





VINOD TIWARI: "There is certainly a great deal of clutter during the telecast of matches"



Consumers are being enticed with freebies, discounts, surprise gifts and contests with truly tempting prizes — all in the hope of creating a recall value in the minds of the consumers

They also need to consider a combination of factors that occupy the minds of their target audience. Firstly, the average Indian viewer is preoccupied with India's fortunes in the Cup. The fact that South Africa or Australia should or will win does not bother him. Secondly, the Indian team is playing miserably in recent times. Keeping that in mind, it is unlikely to survive beyond the first 14 days of this league tournament.

India out, all out

So, if India is out, what happens? Says Shunu Sen of Quadra: "Those who are spending huge amounts need to be extremely careful. Their strategies should be wisely deliberated upon to derive the maximum mileage. Any sort of laxity might boomerang." Adds Sunil Gupta, general manager, HTA: "Their efforts will fall flat on their face if India fails to win. You see, it is a double-edged sword. If India wins they have to shell out a lot. For example, Akai has promised a-Merc each to the players in case the Indians capture the Cup. It is true that the companies are getting more and more inventive in their strategies, but as far as creating a recall-value is concerned, I doubt their success." The companies have also blown money on matches the average Indian may not watch. There will be no major recalls; there will be no major winnings; there will be no major brand share gain; and there will be no major gain in terms of share of voice. The only ones to gain are the media houses and the advertising agencies. Many feel that it is unethical of the advertising agencies to suggest strategies the companies might have to pay for.

In times of recession, some of the product categories which are advertising should be spending the money below the line in areas like distribution augmenting, enhancing consumer service areas, customer loyalty and customer retention programmes. They don't need to create hype and awareness through the World Cup, which is a promotional activity that doesn't manifest the profile of the product being advertised.

The Cup is too big, too overwhelming for the average consumer, who cannot think of anything beyond it. Moreover, a promotion that is so hyped up and involves so many players cannot yield results. There are too many peripheral sponsors. And none remembers unless one is in the core. Not many remember the second man who landed on the moon. But that doesn't seem to impress many companies who have been clean bowled by the Cup itself. •

Devdatta Das/New Delhi

United **A**gainst **DS**

*Delhi NGOs team up
with college students
to spread awareness
about the killer
disease*

The turnout of students and teachers at Delhi's Shaheed Bhagat Singh College hall was impressive. They had come to listen to a lecture on AIDS and HIV. More importantly, most of those present came because they wanted to know more about the disease and what they could do to prevent it.

"It was a very satisfying talk. There was no awkwardness, no hesitation as students openly asked questions not only about HIV and AIDS but also about other sex-related subjects," says Dr Shakuntala Dawesar, a practising doctor and a Rotarian who has been focussing on spreading awareness about AIDS amongst college students since July last year. Though Dr Dawesar has been giving lectures on health-related subjects in colleges for years, she decided to change focus because of the startling projections about the disease: every other person will be HIV positive in another ten years. "The best age to spread awareness among is the 18 to 40 years age group. Amongst these, college students are the



most vulnerable because the amount of information available to them is very limited," says Dr Dawesar.

Dr Dawesar, however, is not the only one who has realised the importance of tapping the college-going, and to a limited extent, the school-going population for spreading awareness. And AIDS, though the most significant issue, is not the only one being highlighted. Sexual health, incest, sexual abuse of children, women's rights, gender-based violence and even care for the environment are issues which are being discussed and dissected by NGOs in colleges and schools.

For instance, when it comes to sexual health, volunteers from the Naz Foundation India Trust are shocked at the lack of information amongst students. "There is a lot of confusion about sexual issues. Even though a lot more information is available today, it is still not enough to remove the doubts of

children," says Vidya Shah, a volunteer with Naz, which holds lectures and workshops on sexual health in schools and colleges. Volunteers from the organisation still have to answer basic questions about masturbation and explain what oral sex is. "Their ignorance is no longer amusing because of the vulnerability of this age group to HIV and AIDS," adds Shah.

RAHI, (Recovering and Healing from Incest), a support centre for women surviving from incest, for instance, was surprised by the results of the first ever research that it conducted on incest in India. Seventy per cent of the respondents were college students. "On the basis of these findings we realised that this was a group we needed to focus on," says Anuja Gupta director, RAHI. What followed were workshops in different colleges in Delhi to get girls to talk about their experiences. "We want to

provide women who have suffered from incest and child sexual abuse a space where they can come and share their feelings and thoughts," says Gupta.

UNIFEM, on the other hand, decided to make youth a target group for its global campaign on the elimination of gender-based violence in the south Asian region in December last year. Schools and colleges organised speaker symposiums, debates and film screenings on the subject. Essay competitions and plays too were a part of the campaign amongst the group, considered "critical to the elimination of violence against women".

Though the work being done in these fields is a promising beginning, there are many who are dismissive about merely spreading awareness — and that too amongst only a small percentage of the target group. This school of thought believes that the efforts have to be concerted with the government stepping in to make sexual awareness a part of the school and college curricula. Says a social worker, "The benefits of holding one session every year on sex-related subjects amongst XIth and XIIth class students or arming yourself with statistics and going to a college for a workshop as and when you are asked to is going to achieve nothing. How much can you explain and teach in three hours?"

"What we need is individual motivation," argues Dawesar. "We don't need billboards telling people to use condoms for safe sex because these messages don't lead to actual comprehension of the subject." Adds Anuja Gupta of RAHI, "If we are focussed and can motivate a few students it would lead to a chain reaction with these students working to do more."

And this has already started happening. RAHI, for instance, invites volunteers from among students. These volun-



It has been tough taking awareness programmes to schools. Often school

principals, approached for talks on sexual health, would be shocked

teers — six to seven who work regularly and about ten of them who are roped in as and when the need arises — help RAHI in organising workshops in colleges and also among groups comprising families and friends. Volunteers also help with documentation and conducting research for the organisation. It's a



learning experience for volunteers as well. Says Shivali, a student at the Jesus and Mary College and a volunteer with RAHI, "I am very happy coming to the RAHI office. I learn a lot because I collect information related to incest from the Internet. And when I help RAHI organise a talk I feel I have contributed something. It may not be much, but at least I have done something positive."

The Naz Foundation too has decided to involve college students in spreading awareness about sexual health. For a four-month-old project for UNESCO, the organisation has formed a peer group of 30 students from four colleges in Delhi. These students are now spreading awareness about sexual health. "This is just a pilot project. We have not structured it too much because we want to see what the peer group is most comfortable doing for spreading the message. We are waiting for this group to take the initiative and then we will chalk out a course for them," says Shah.

The first activity by the peer group was a play on World Aids Day which got a good response and now the group is preparing for holding sessions in different colleges for dissemination of information on sexual health.

Realising that the students they pick up need to be exceptionally motivated to be able to organise diverse activities, both RAHI and Naz follow rigid selection processes. RAHI makes those who volunteer go through a day-long Vision Workshop where students come up with workable ideas to create awareness about incest and child sexual abuse. "We want to tell the students that it is their vision which will help them spread the message. This vision has to be practical. It has to be something they can go out and do on their own," says Gupta. Those who pass this test are then enrolled as volunteers.

Moreover, RAHI has also decided to keep its focus group very limited: middle-and-upper-middle-class women. So the colleges targeted are elite and English medium ones only. "There is a general tendency that incest does not happen in our kinds of families. We want to expose the hypocrisy of the upper-middle-class family life," says Gupta.

Naz too followed a stringent process for selecting the peer group. It held discussions amongst first year college students who were asked to fill in detailed forms about themselves. The students were also asked to give their reasons for

wanting to be a part of the peer group and were made to go through a number of exercises, like the condom exercise where they were all given condoms and asked to make whatever shape they wanted out of them. "The basic reason for these exercises was to see the commitment levels of the students. We also wanted to check out their attitude and ensure that they did not have any biases," says Shah. Now, Naz is waiting to see what direction the peer group takes. The ultimate aim, of course, is to make it self-sustainable.



SHAKUNTALA DAWESAR

**"We don't need
billboards telling
people to use
condoms for safe sex
because these
messages don't lead
to actual
comprehension of
the subject"**

There is another smaller, though significant, fallout of NGOs working with young people. For those who have suffered either from child sexual abuse or who have not been careful and may be HIV positive, they offer something to fall back on. Both Sakshi, which deals with child sexual abuse and incest, and RAHI have been approached by girls in need of counselling because of sexual abuse suffered during childhood. "We

provide them an avenue which they did not even know existed. They come and talk to us about their problems and we provide them counselling," says Sakshi's Dr Hemlata. Even Naz has told its peer group that they can use the counselling and other facilities available in their office. "What we want to instil in these students is that they should not be judgemental. If a person they know has not had safe sex, they should not be disparaging but should be able to tell him that getting tested would be the best course of action," says Shah.

All this, however, has been achieved after a lot of hard work. Most NGOs maintain that the going has not been as easy as they had expected. It has been tougher with schools and this is the reason why more work is being done amongst college students. "When we approached school principals for talks on sexual health, most of them were shocked about the issues we wanted to discuss. Colleges, on the other hand, provide more space as the timetable is not so rigid," says Naz's Shah. Naz has also held workshops for school teachers on AIDS and HIV so that it would be easier for them to reach out to the students. At the moment, besides the work in colleges, the organisation holds one-off workshops for XIth and XIIth class students in public schools in Delhi.

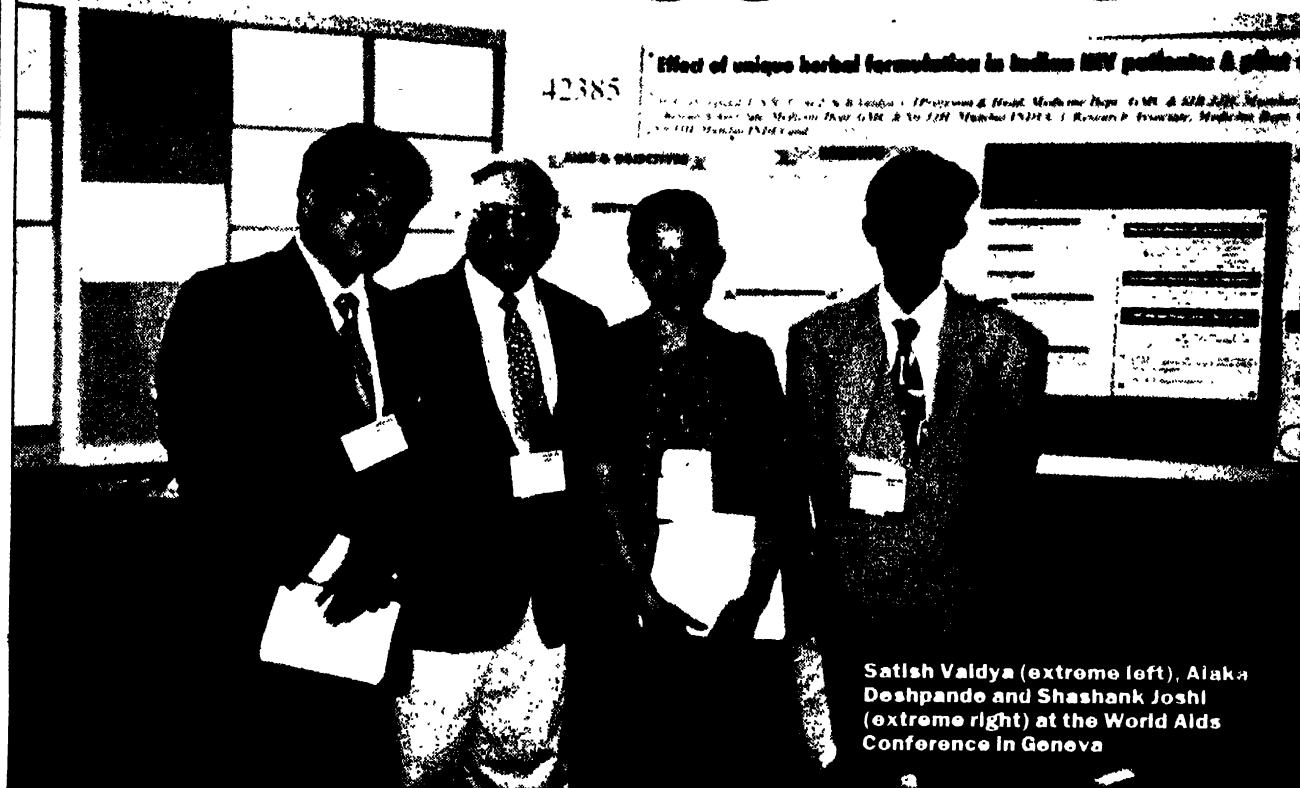
Even Sakshi, which holds regular workshops in both public and government schools, has had to face a lot of hurdles. "The going was a lot tougher when we started. The general impression was that we were going to talk only about sex. Now the situation is slightly different because over the years we have managed to build a rapport with schools," says Dr Hemlata. At the moment, Sakshi is in the process of working out a module on child sexual abuse for classes V and VI so that it can become a part of the curricula.

There is, however, some optimism now amongst NGOs. Says RAHI's Gupta, "I know it sounds terrible but AIDS has opened new doors for us. After the campaign for creating awareness about the disease, more people are becoming open to discussing sexual issues. This has been the only positive fallout of the disease in India."

Ironical though it is, if a dreaded disease like AIDS can help in creating awareness and preventing other social abuses, why not? •

Punam Thakur/New Delhi

Life Positive



Satish Vaidya (extreme left), Alaka Deshpande and Shashank Joshi (extreme right) at the World Aids Conference in Geneva

As scientists the world over struggle to find a potent cure for Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome, three Bombay-based researchers claim to have found an ayurvedic drug to treat this deadly and dreaded disease. They are — Prof. Dr Alaka Deshpande, Maharashtra state AIDS physician who also heads the department of medicine at Sir J.J. Hospital; Dr Shashank Joshi, consulting endocrine physician in-charge of the AIDS clinic at Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Hospital and Satish Vaidya, pharmacologist (indigenous drugs) at Pharmaveda. They have developed an ayurvedic drug that helps to boost the HIV-infected patient's immune status and maintains it at normal levels.

"In finding a cure for AIDS, scientists the world over are focussing efforts on eradicating the HIV virus. We chose to explore the possibility of stopping the destructive effect of the virus on the victim's defence system," informs Dr

Three Bombay-based researchers develop an ayurvedic drug to combat AIDS

Joshi. So, what this newly discovered ayurvedic drug does is potentiate or restore the immune response of HIV-positive patients so that they can be protected against fatal diseases and thereby improve their quality of life as well as their life expectancy.

When the HIV virus strikes, it directly cripples its victim's immune status by attacking or infecting the CD4 lymphocyte, a central communicator cell. It communicates with other cells of the immune system and helps elicit an immune response to counter any infection. With rapidly decreasing CD4 counts (i.e. immunity), the HIV-positive patient becomes vulnerable to a

host of conventional afflictions like jaundice, tuberculosis, diarrhoea, unexplained fever, fatigue, herpes etc. Over a period of time, he develops full-blown AIDS, leading to inevitable death.

Focussing on this essential nature of HIV, these researchers came up with an ayurvedic formula, Reimun, which completely normalised the CD4 counts of HIV-infected patients. A one-year pilot study to evaluate the herbal drug was successfully conducted and findings of these tests were presented at the 12th World AIDS Conference at Geneva, Switzerland last year. The conference report states: "The medicine is inexpensive, free from side effects and a promising immunopotentiator and therefore useful in developing countries."

Nearly 400 HIV-positive patients from and around Bombay have been treated with the ayurvedic drug successfully, claims Dr Joshi. Says Dr Chad Womack, research fellow at the Harvard AIDS Institute, Boston who was on a visit to Bombay recently: "I have met

several patients and physicians who are using Reimun and it seems to be working. Even the patients' data corroborate this." Dr Shantilal Kataria who had administered the ayurvedic drug on several of his HIV patients, claims that Reimun literally "rejuvenates them". "It dramatically helps them to face the disease and the world bravely with a new ray of hope."

David Scoundras, president of Boston-based Search For A Cure says, that it would be interesting to study Reimun with the existing anti-viral drugs. "The present anti-retroviral therapy is cumbersome and costly with a high incidence of adverse effects. Reimun will help them to act better in a less toxic manner." He is studying Dr Joshi's findings and is likely to conduct Phase I trials in the US.

An open-labelled pilot study was first conducted on 21 HIV+ patients aged between 20 and 50 years. Their CD4 lymphocyte counts ranged from 200 to 500 and the haemoglobin level was of seven gm. Based on the encouraging results of this pilot study, a double blinded study was carried out on another 25 patients. While 15 of them were administered the ayurvedic drug, the remaining were given conventional medicines for treating HIV virus. The patients were seen on a monthly basis for several tests and physical examination. This clinical and immunological evaluation continued for over 360 days.

At the end of the one-year study, patients undergoing the therapy showed "encouraging" results — a significant and sustained increase in CD4 lymphocyte count. While CD4 of patients receiving conventional therapy decreased by 90.9 counts, that of the patients receiving the drug increased by 140.33. The immuno-restorative effect of the drug was further confirmed by an over-all improvement in the clinical status of these patients — their haemoglobin steadily climbed to 14.3, weights increased significantly and they showed better response to conventional therapy for opportunistic infections. Moreover, the medication showed no side effects. The patients were free of liver and renal toxicities.

But why the focus on an ayurvedic drug? For several reasons, informs Dr Joshi. With an increasing tribe of quacks offering alternative therapies, she says, there was a growing need to scientifically evaluate such claims by

conducting controlled clinical studies by experts. Secondly, the ayurvedic drug would be economical which is the need of the hour, what with the prevalent anti-retroviral therapy costing as much as Rs 25,000 to Rs 30,000 a month.

Moreover, informs Dr Deshpande, there are several drugs of herbal origin which Indian and Chinese medicine have described as having immunomodulating and immunopotentiating activities. "All we had to do is formulate and come up with the right drug." Indigenous drugs used for preparing the medication are: Astragalus memberanacaus (*katira*), Angelica galuca (*chorak*), Achyranthes bidentata (*lalongo*), Picrorhiza kuorra (*kutki*), Taraxacum officinale (*dudhal*), Zingibar officinale (*saunth*), Withania somnifera (*ashwagandha*), Asparagus racemosus (*shatavari*), Tinospora cordifolia (*Giloy*), Allium sativum (*lasuna*), Curcuma Inga (*halad*), Glycyrrhiza glabra (*jestimadh*), Prunella vulgaris (*ustukhudus*), Trichosanthes palmata

(*mahakal*) and oxides of pearl, iron and zinc.

Reimun will soon be commercially launched world-wide by Pharmaved. It will be available at the local chemist's shop on prescription in the form of tablets. A pack of tablets lasting a month will be available for Rs 1800 throughout the country. However, stipulated strict guidelines need to be followed by the patient undergoing the medication — he will have to abstain from non-vegetarian and fermented food and alcohol.

"Reimun should not be confused as a cure for AIDS," warns Dr Joshi. This drug, he says, substantially resurrects the immunity of a HIV+ patient if consumed throughout a year as prescribed. "In layman's terms, this means that the HIV virus does not disappear altogether from the patient's system with Reimun. It will merely counteract the virus so that it does not create a havoc with its victim's immune status and in short, gives him a new lease of life." •

Kanjal Walla/Bombay

GETTING BETTER

An AIDS patient responds to ayurvedic treatment

Thirty-year-old Ganesh Tambi (not his real name), a migrant from Karnataka, worked in an Udipi restaurant in Bombay. Two years ago he began to show the by-now-familiar symptoms of an HIV-infection — unexplained fever and loss of appetite which subsequently reduced his weight from 80 to 42 kg. Then he was struck down by a serious bout of pneumonia, followed by tuberculosis. His CD4 count reduced drastically to 50.

Tambi fell unconscious while undergoing treatment at a local government hospital. His CT scan report showed him having multiple balls of parasite called toxoplasma in his brain. The HIV virus in him had developed into a full-blown AIDS one and he was almost dead. At this stage, he was administered with ayurvedic drug therapy.

It took two weeks for his system to clinically respond to the drug. The signs of a palpable improvement came only after six weeks. His CD4 count climbed to 180, weight increased to 50 kg and haemoglobin level rose substantially. His attending physician says that Tambi is "slowly but surely recovering towards good health".

"Earlier, I would tire easily. Now, comparatively, I feel much more energetic, agile," said an optimistic, if still frail, Tambi.





Kalyan Singh : difficult times

Political developments in New Delhi have not only sidelined and diluted the anti-Kalyan Singh campaign, but have also left the dissidents high and dry

UNEASY QUIET

UP chief minister Kalyan Singh gets a brief respite as dissidents silence their guns

Kalyan Singh is proving to be a great survivor. During his 18 months' tenure as chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, Kalyan's rivals — either Mayawati or his own party colleagues — have demanded his ouster. But strangely, the demand for his removal and crisis in the BJP central leadership have often coincided. Result: Kalyan Singh has always managed to bail out.

This is exactly what appears to be the outcome of a recent attempt by the party dissidents to remove Kalyan Singh from the chief minister's post in Uttar

Pradesh. However, political developments in New Delhi have not only sidelined and diluted the anti-Kalyan Singh campaign, but have left the dissidents high and dry.

The disgruntled group of MLAs and MLCs who, until recently, were spewing venom against Kalyan, have finally laid down their arms. As Neeraj Aggarwal, who was in the forefront of the anti-Kalyan campaign, said, "The campaign has been set aside for the time being to meet bigger challenges posed by the developments at the Centre. The reality is otherwise."

BJP's central leadership is understood to have silenced the dissidents. So whether they like it or not, they must follow the leader. Kalyan's critics believe that by default, the UP chief minister has proved that he alone is the leader. In fact, the alternatives proposed by dissidents, or considered by the central leadership, at one stage or the other, have proved to be of no match to the political prowess of Kalyan Singh.

State public works department minister Kalraj Mishra, the main force behind the anti-Kalyan campaign, state BJP chief Raj Nath Singh, or even housing

Waiting to Strike

*Mulayam Singh Yadav
and Mayawati are
biding time to oust
Kalyan Singh*

Immediately after the trust vote in Parliament that sealed the fate of the 13-month-old Vajpayee government on 17 April, the political crisis shifted to Uttar Pradesh. Mayawati, who was instrumental in dislodging the BJP-led government at the Centre, let the BJP down for settling old scores in Lucknow. Immediately Kalyan Singh rushed from Delhi to Lucknow to hold his citadel. The UP chief minister said: "There was no danger whatsoever to my government. I am aware that some people are gunning for me and they will try their bit, but let me assure you they will not succeed."

Though Kalyan Singh's detractors blame him for the fall of the Vajpayee government, his supporters, however, wonder how a trade-off with Mayawati could have benefitted the BJP. Kalyan's opponents are still relying on Mayawati's backing in the "Operation oust Kalyan". "If you can get him replaced, I will spare the BJP," Mayawati allegedly told a dissident.

To take advantage of Mayawati's move, a small yet strong lobby of

Kalyan Singh's Cabinet met Vajpayee to seek Kalyan's removal. Two UP ministers, Kalraj Mishra and Lalji Tandon had even gone to the extent of offering their resignations in case the party high command was still not in a position to sack Kalyan Singh. At the moment, however, common people are blaming Mayawati for going with the Congress during the trust vote and destabilising the country.

Mulayam Singh Yadav is another threat to Kalyan Singh. However, Mulayam's role in the latest political drama at the Centre has disbalanced him. Mulayam has been criticised for not backing the Congress' bid for power. It will be premature to conclude that Muslim voters will desert him in Uttar Pradesh. The worst case scenario for the Samajwadi Party chief, political observers say, is a divided Muslim vote-bank in the next elections, that may work to the advantage of the BJP. Some sections of the Muslim community have already charged Mulayam with having no agenda for Muslims and compared him to the Congress, which has been using the community as mere vote-bank.

Given the present state of political crisis, Mayawati and Mulayam, it seems Kalyan Singh has all the time in the world to set his house in order. •



**Mulayam Singh Yadav and Mayawati:
Kalyan's bete noire**



minister Lalji Tandon, who is Atal Behari Vajpayee's Man Friday in his constituency, Lucknow, have failed to emerge as Kalyan's replacement.

In fact, barring Raj Nath Singh, who still has a mass base and wide appeal, Kalraj Mishra and Lalji Tandon neither have the profile nor the mass appeal to win votes for the party in the hustings.

Until last week, the dissidents who had swelled to nearly 50 in number held daily luncheon or dinner meetings. Though no new strategy could be drawn out by them, the whole idea was to keep the anti-Kalyan campaign tempo alive. Even after Kalyan Singh formally met most of the dissidents individually before leaving for Delhi, the dissidents got together once again. And this time, they passed resolutions urging the chief minister to realise ground realities and step down from office on his own. They also took a vow to put 'tilak' on each other's forehead with their respective blood as a mark of solidarity in reiterating the demand for Kalyan Singh's ouster.

Terming their mission as "save BJP campaign", they made it loud and clear that Kalyan's continuance in office was bound to be detrimental to the larger interests of the party. Without naming the chief minister, they called upon "those sitting at the helm of affairs to rise above their personal ego and give up the position of power in the larger interest of the party".

This move was in sharp contrast to Kalyan's claim, shortly before his departure to New Delhi, that the dissidents have finally come to terms with the reality. "I have met each and every member of the Loktantrik Congress Party (LCP) as well the Jantantrik Bahujan Samaj Party (JBSP), besides all senior BJP leaders, and their responses have been very positive," the chief minister told SUNDAY over telephone.

Hinting that all misgivings between him and the dissidents have been sorted out, he maintained, "I have met nearly every so-called dissident. They were back satisfied and I can assure you that my government will complete its full term." He also ruled out the question of change in leadership, while indicating that his two rival claimants, Lalji Tandon and Kalraj Mishra, have returned satisfied after long parleys with him.

But this may not be entirely true. Because at the time the top state BJP leaders, including Kalyan Singh, were



A.B. Vajpayee with Kalyan Singh and Lalji Tandon (right): temporary truce

camping in New Delhi, the band of dissidents were holding a meeting at a hotel in Lucknow to review the situation. Later, Surjeet Singh Dang, a former minister in Kalyan's last regime and the spokesperson of the dissident band, said that their meeting had left some of them confused. So the storm was far from over.

Another prominent dissident Rajesh Pandey, who has been in the forefront of the "Oust Kalyan" campaign right from day one, denied having met the chief minister at all. "I was invited, but I refused to have any word with him," Pandey shot back.

The meeting of the dissidents, which was attended by as many as 50 anti-Kalyan politicians, passed five resolutions. The foremost of which sought "a change in the UP leadership". Another resolution expressed serious concern over the growing harassment of several legislators, who had sounded the bugle of protest. The dissidents also resolved for an expeditious publication of the CBI inquiry report into the murder of former BJP minister Brahmdukt Dwivedi.

"Alienation of party workers" was the main charge against the chief minister. In fact, what had irked dissidents most was the "neglect of senior leaders and projection of new-comers with little or no BJP background" by Kalyan Singh government. To drive home their point, they criticised the meteoric rise of

Kusum Rai to the status of a minister of state and attributed her lift to her proximity to the chief minister.

Rai, who began her political career as a municipal corporator barely a year-and-a-half ago, was recently named chairperson of the State Social Welfare



Kusum Rai: causing trouble for Kalyan Singh

Board in the rank of a minister of state. Her husband, who until recently was a part-timer in two local newspapers, was appointed OSD in the state information department.

The young municipal corporator would not have drawn much attention, but for her land acquisitions in a very short time. The wealth acquired by her over the brief spell that Kalyan Singh has been the CM has attracted the attention of the Central Board of Direct Taxes, which has reportedly ordered an inquiry against her.

Kalyan, who has been known for his forthrightness and integrity and therefore regarded as BJP's best bet in Uttar Pradesh, was drawing much flak solely because of his association with this corporator. Her proximity to a ganglord-turned-MLC has caused further embarrassment for Kalyan Singh who had since been associated with the alleged criminal too.

Interestingly, however, a section of the dissidents were still not willing to give up. They want to have a showdown with the chief minister once and for all. They firmly believe that once the Delhi dust settles down, the top BJP leadership would focus its attention on Uttar Pradesh and take a final decision on the long-pending demand of the dissidents. •

Sharat Pradhan/Lucknow



Surely, a BJP regime suits Mulayam more than that of the Congress. His vitriolic outbursts against the BJP could pay him political dividends while a rejuvenated Congress will dig into his Muslim vote-bank

The risk factor

You can fool some people for sometime, but not all people for all time. Perhaps this best describes Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav's relationship with the Muslims. While the latter's disillusionment with Mulayam has been growing for sometime, Mulayam's recent act of throwing a spanner in the formation of an alternative government at the Centre seems to have virtually alienated him from those who had until not very long ago hailed him as their messiah.

At least in the heartland of his political base, Uttar Pradesh, Mulayam is being criticised and condemned even by that section of Muslims who had been his ardent admirers. This was despite the local papers in Lucknow running statements of his cronies praising the SP chief for taking a tough stand.

Interestingly, the only Muslim leader

Mulayam Singh Yadav seems to have alienated the Muslims by his controversial stand on alternative government

who hailed Mulayam for his act was none other than his own partyman and leader of the Opposition in the state Assembly, Ahmad Hasan. Hasan's statement got banner headlines in papers where a few journalists still remain indebted to the former UP chief minister for his largesse from the CM's discretionary fund.

But Hasan's claims seemed far from ground realities. "Perhaps Muslims formally associated with Mulayam's party

are the ones who are happy with his decision. Obviously they have no choice in a one-man-show party," says Fasih Ahmed, an ex-colonel. He goes on to add, "Go and ask a common Muslim who does not have any formal political association with the Samajwadi Party and you will know the anger that is simmering in his mind against Mulayam Singh Yadav."

Holding Mulayam totally responsible for throwing the nation into yet another election, Ahmed seeks to know, "What right did the Opposition have to pull down a functioning government when they were not sure of an alternative?" He firmly believes, "Mulayam was only interested in being projected as the Prime Minister or at least deputy prime minister to fulfil his lifetime desire; obviously since Sonia Gandhi was not willing to concede that, he began to lash out at the Congress and even the CPI(M)

which had supported him in the worst of times."

M. Siddiqui, a motor garage owner who had been an ardent Mulayam supporter ever since he ordered firing on violent *kar sevaks* who stormed the Babri Masjid in 1990, is equally sore with Mulayam now. "Simply by getting a statement issued that Muslims were all for him, Mulayam thinks he has the backing of the entire Muslim electorate; let there be elections and he will know his worth."

A government employee, A.A. Abbasi, too, sees no logic in Mulayam's stand which he feels "reflects his selfish and self-centred approach". Likewise Homa Zaidi, an educationist, says, "I am sure with his recent action, he stands exposed and isolated."

For Roomi Khwaja, a 30-year-old businessman in Lucknow's walled city, "Mulayam had been cornering the support of Muslims by creating a BJP phobia among them. He has been trying to impress upon Muslims that they must feel indebted to the Samajwadi Party for saving their lives from the fundamentalist *sangh parivarwallahs*." What puzzles Roomi is, "How can such a person claim to be a well-wisher of this community when his entire strategy was based on terrorising us?"

That prompts his friend Ashraf to ask, "And what harm has the BJP been able to cause? After all, the party has been in power for about 18 months in this state."

Their impression was substantiated by a Delhi-based journalist, whose first meeting with the SP chief in Lucknow was a nightmare. The Muslim scribe recalls the taste he had of Mulayam's ire simply because he wanted to know whether Mulayam would take the party beyond the confines of Uttar Pradesh. "How dare you ask me this? Don't you know that I am the national president of my party which already has active units in every state of the country?"

That was followed by a long sermon: "Now go and write something that will be remembered by generations; write that the BJP is silent only till the Samajwadi Party is around; remember, once the Samajwadi Party goes, you will not be able to speak freely, not to speak about moving freely outside."

While prominent Islamic clerics preferred not to comment on the stand taken by Mulayam, several others from the middle rung were candid enough to flay the SP leader for what he did. "If he really wanted communal forces out, Mulayam should have assisted the Con-

gress rather than adopt a posture that has eventually proved beneficial to the BJP," remarked the Imam of Lucknow's Tile Wali Masjid.

The general impression was that Mulayam had thus far monopolised the Muslim support simply because the community had no alternative.

A weak Congress with a passive role in the Babri Masjid demolition was no match for the might of the saffron bri-

ings again.

Political observers believe that once it was established that the Congress had the potential to return to power, a majority of Muslims would happily retrace their steps to the Congress. After all, it has been the minority psychology to go for the party which displays the potential to stride on to power and thereby combat communal forces. The Congress is already being seen as one that could foot this bill.



Muslims who had been ardent supporters of Mulayam ever since he ordered firing on the violent *kar sevaks* who stormed the Babri Masjid in 1990, are sore with him now

gade, while the Bahujan Samaj Party's repeated flirtations with the BJP left Mulayam as the only one to corner the major chunk of their vote-bank.

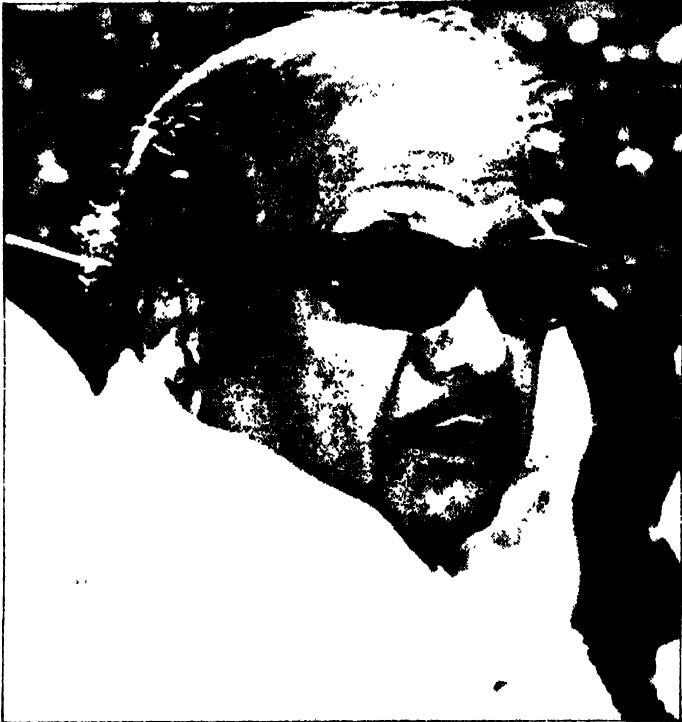
Echoing apologies tendered by the Congress for the Ayodhya episode followed by its visible rejuvenation, though in bits and pieces, had generated a new hope among Muslims. A sizeable number of them had begun to see the Congress as an alternative to the Samajwadi Party.

"Much lies in store for the Congress, which alone has the potential to fight back the BJP as a national party; smaller parties cannot match the might of such a gigantic party like the Congress," observes Siddiqui. He was quite convinced that the tilt would be visible at the hust-

Ironically, it was the BJP-minded people who seemed to be buoyant over what Mulayam had done. "Well, that was perhaps the only good thing the Samajwadi Party chief had done in his life — to thwart the moves of a foreigner to ride on to the Prime Minister's chair," observed Ashok, a shopkeeper and BJP activist.

And this has led many to ask, "Don't you think Mulayam and the BJP supplement each other?" Surely, a BJP regime suits Mulayam more than that of the Congress. His vitriolic outbursts against the BJP could pay him political dividends while a rejuvenated Congress is sure to dig into his domain of Muslim votes. •

Sherat Pradhan/Lucknow



The domino effect

The fall of the Vajpayee government at the Centre will see reworking of political equations in Tamil Nadu

Chief minister M. Karunanidhi: making new friends

The fall of the Vajpayee government has changed the face of Dravidian politics. The ruling DMK's decision to vote in favour of the BJP government during the confidence motion has stirred up a hornets' nest. The DMK appears to be politically isolated in Tamil Nadu as its allies — the TMC, the CPI(M), the CPI and the Indian National League — and also those who are sympathetic to it, like the Tamizhaga Muslim Munnatra Kazhagam (TMMK), are piqued by the decision.

But chief minister M. Karunanidhi does not seem to be embarrassed. The DMK supremo says that there was no choice as "Jayalalitha, in pursuit of her objectives, namely wriggling out of corruption cases against her and seeking the dismissal of the DMK government under a new political dispensation" had changed sides.

When asked whether he would continue to support the BJP, Karunanidhi evaded the question. Said a peeved CM: "We have supported the confidence motion. But more than that, the fact is that we have acted against Jayalalitha after realising her ulterior motives."

Karunanidhi's argument was that his party's supporting the confidence motion was essentially a decision against Jayalalitha and that there was no ideo-

logical shift towards the BJP. Despite the brave front, the chief minister seems to be on a sticky wicket. Grapevine has it that intelligence men parked in the lobby of Delhi's Maurya Sheraton hotel had informed him that the Vajpayee government would win the confidence vote. Karunanidhi no doubt was rattled as he had not bargained for Vajpayee's defeat. In fact, the CM had decided to bail out the BJP only under the hope that his six votes would prove decisive. But it was Mayawati who upset all calculations.

Now that the results have come, Karunanidhi is trying to put up a brave face. But he has become cautious about his future relationship with the BJP. "Let's wait and see. Our executive will decide

The DMK supporting the confidence motion was essentially a decision against Jayalalitha. There was no ideological shift towards the BJP

on the future course of action," the CM said. The DMK's rank and file seems to have endorsed the stand taken by Karunanidhi on the ground that only by ensuring its continuance, can the DMK hope to negate any possibility of the "corruption-tainted" AIADMK staging a comeback in Tamil Nadu under the leadership of Jayalalitha.

Was the DMK again let down by the Left parties, especially Harkishen Singh Surjeet? A few days before the confidence vote, Murasoli Maran had met Surjeet and urged him to impress upon Sonia Gandhi to take the DMK as a partner in a possible Congress-led coalition. Maran's argument was that "DMK was a more dependable ally than the AIADMK".

Earlier, Karunanidhi was seen praising Sonia Gandhi as he was keen to work out a deal with the Congress before the fall of the BJP government. But the Congress president spurned his offer as Arjun Singh was in favour of a tie-up with the AIADMK and told the Congress leadership that Karunanidhi was indicted in the Jain Commission report.

At the same time, Surjeet was sure that a cornered DMK will not vote for the BJP. Laments a DMK MLA, "The Left is the villain in the entire drama. They have always left us in the lurch at



Jayalalitha: touch-and-go situation

crucial times. When Vaiko was thrown out of the party, they propped him up. Now, they have tied the knots with the queen of corruption and communalism in Tamil Nadu."

Defending the DMK's decision, Dravidian ideologue M.S.S. Pandian said: "The Left demi-gods who run the CPI(M) should take the blame for pushing the DMK into the BJP fold. Their unprincipled opportunism has blown the possibility of a third front." Pandian pointed out that it was the DMK which had a better secular track record than the AIADMK.

Meanwhile, the DMK's traditional votebank, the Muslims, are shocked by the recent development. Said INL state president M.A. Latheef: "We cannot understand why the DMK chose to embrace the BJP. There is bound to be a disastrous fallout for the DMK." But DMK sources said that Karunanidhi will do everything possible so that the party's minority support base is not weakened.

What are the options before the CM? He may work out a deal with the BJP whereby all the accused in the Coimbatore bomb blast case — mainly the supporters of the dreaded Al Umma — are released on bail. Just before the DMK announced its support to the BJP,

Karunanidhi put the controversial anti-Muslim Prevention of Terrorists Activities (POTA) Bill on the backburner. More sops, including special recruitment in state police, are also on the anvil.

Meanwhile, DMK ally Tamil Maanila Congress (TMC) seems to be caught in a bind. TMC president G.K. Moopanar has to choose between the "corruption of the AIADMK" and the "communalism of the BJP". Then, there is the question of his loyalty to the Nehru-Gandhi family. Even within the three-member TMC, opinion was divided on the confidence vote. Two of its MPs, led by Nagarcoil MP Dennis, had said that they would vote for the Congress. In fact, for the past two months, Moopanar had been trying to meet Dennis who managed to give him the slip. Only former finance minister P. Chidambaram wanted to abstain. By voting against the government, the TMC in effect, averted a split.

The TMC-DMK relationship had soured much before the confidence vote. At stake were local issues. In fact, the alliance survived only because of the friendship between Karunanidhi and Moopanar.



Karunanidhi with Moopanar: old friends

But Moopanar will now be in a position to hijack the third front in Tamil Nadu from Karunanidhi. If Moopanar can convince Sonia Gandhi to join the third front in Tamil Nadu, it will be a winning combination.

How will Jayalalitha and her AIADMK manage to survive? Her party is known for its loyal votebank. Opinion

polls before the confidence vote indicated that she was on a comeback trail. Added to this is the anti-incumbency factor working against the Karunanidhi government.

If Jayalalitha is able to corner the Christian-Muslim votes, she is likely have the last laugh. But with Opposition parties probably blaming her for the immediate elections and the RSS and the BJP gunning for her, it would be a touch and go situation.

Vaiko and his MDMK seem to be the biggest losers. Moopanar, Jayalalitha and the Left parties will not touch him with a barge pole. The only way out for him would be to merge his party with the DMK, which he is unlikely to do. The PMK of Dr Ramdoss has said that for the time being they are with the BJP. But it can take a "flexible" political approach with its strong Vanniyar votebank.

The DMK allies barring the Left are now asking Karunanidhi to reconsider his decision. But with no sign of relenting, the CPI(M) in Tamil Nadu is planning a "campaign against the ruling party" over the issue. A third front led by Moopanar and the Left may even break away from the DMK-led front. They

have decided to "mobilise" their ranks and hold a public meeting on 28 April to mark the dissociation.

So what happens to the BJP in Tamil Nadu? Nobody is talking about it as the party always depended on one of the Dravidian parties for survival. The coming weeks are going to be very crucial for the Karunanidhi government. •

Sreedhar Pillai/Madras



Gopinath Munde: the energy minister was discomfited when the High Court ordered a CBI probe into Maharashtra State Electricity Board, a corporation under his charge

Skidding out?

The ruling BJP-Shiv Sena combine in Maharashtra is staggering under corruption charges

In the funny, fickle world of politics, there is at least one constant — a cliched, over-used word called accountability. You can come to power highlighting the misdemeanours of your predecessor and promising a clean, fair government. But the opposite is also true: you can be booted out if you don't deliver. More so, if you are guilty of the same misdemeanours.

Back in 1995, corruption was the single-most important issue that propelled the Shiv Sena-BJP combine to power in Maharashtra. The Enron controversy was at its peak and the man they painted black was Sharad Pawar, the then Congress chief minister. Pawar, they said,

was guilty of 'corrupt dealings' regarding Enron. Now, four-and-a-half years on, with Assembly polls scheduled for 2000 AD, corruption ironically is once again the issue. And, this time, it's the ruling coalition that is in very real danger of being voted out.

The seriousness of the situation can be gauged from the number of ministers being investigated on charges of graft.

In the news now is social welfare minister Babanrao Gholap who's being tried in two lower courts. One of the charges levelled against him is his alleged involvement in what has come to be known as the Awami bank scam. According to the economic offences wing of

the Bombay Police, Gholap, his wife and his 'trusted servant', Shivaji Morade, received Rs 40 lakh in kickbacks. The alleged break-up: Gholap Rs 4 lakh, his wife Rs 17 lakh and Morade Rs 19 lakh.

In September 1998, the general branch of the CID had registered a case against seven persons, including Gholap's personal assistant, in connection with embezzlement of government funds from three state-owned corporations — the Mahatma Phule Backward Class Corporation, the Vasantrao Naik Corporation and the Loksahir Annabhau Sathe Development Corporation.

As per the rules of the government,

the funds of these corporations, pending disbursement, have to be deposited with nationalised banks. Instead, the corporations deposited Rs 5 crore with the Awami Mercantile Co-operative Bank, which was under liquidation. The Reserve Bank of India had even imposed a ban on the bank from accepting any deposits.

After the maturity period was over, Awami bank failed to return the actual amount and the accrued interest. Only Rs 50 lakh was returned to the Loksahir Corporation; Rs 4.5 crore was siphoned off.

According to the police, finance broker Vijay Mehta—one of the main accused in the scam—had connived with Gholap's personal assistant to arrange for the funds to be deposited with the bank. For his role, say investigators, Mehta received a commission of Rs 57 lakh, of which he passed on 40 lakh to the minister. In his statement to the police, the former managing director of Mahatma Phule Corporation said that Gholap had instructed him over phone to further extend the earlier deposit of Rs 1 crore with Awami bank and also to deposit an additional sum of Rs 3 crore there.

In the second case against Gholap, the state Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) has registered an offence against him and his wife under the Prevention of Corruption Act for illegal gratification, amassing of wealth disproportionate to his known source of income and abuse of official position. Gholap, who pleaded 'not guilty' for a while, backed by party leaders—chief minister Narayan Rane and Bal Thackeray—, finally resigned on 26 April. The state Opposition's ruthless accusations against him, which went on during much of the Budget session, had greatly embarrassed the Shiv Sena-BJP combine, and they felt Gholap should go.

In late March this year, it was the turn of deputy CM Gopinath Munde, who is in charge of the energy ministry, to feel discomfited when the Bombay High Court ordered a CBI inquiry into the possibility of 'extraneous considerations' in the Rs 187-crore Maharashtra State Electricity Board (MSEB) scam. The bombshell dropped when the High Court ordered that further tenders floated by the MSEB must be evaluated by the Power Finance Corporation. Incidentally, Munde is also the first minister in the state Cabinet to have a CBI probe ordered by the High Court into a corpora-

tion under his charge.

In January 1998, MSEB had awarded the contract of retrofitting turbines in all its 15 thermal power units to Powerplant Performance Improvement Ltd (PPIL), a joint venture of Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL) and Siemens AG. The contract was awarded even after MSEB's technical members had advised against giving it to PPIL. In a confidential letter to the state energy secretary, G.S. Gill, the MSEB member-secretary had written that the contract should not be awarded to PPIL for technical as well as professional reasons.

When Congress legislator Digvijay Khanvilkar, who later filed a writ petition in the High Court, pointed out the irregularities in the Assembly session in March, Munde justified the decision saying that the company was competent enough. However, when the petition



Sharad Pawar:
got entangled
in the Enron
controversy



Manohar Joshi: was
held guilty of
misusing his
executive
powers

came up for final hearing, the MSEB *suo motu* cancelled the entire deal without assigning any reason.

Earlier, it was former CM Manohar Joshi who was in the line of fire after the High Court held him guilty of 'misusing his executive powers' and 'pressurising officials to do an illegal act'. As urban development minister, Joshi was found responsible for getting a plot earmarked for a primary school dereserved for his builder son-in-law Girish Vyas's multi-storied complexes in a posh locality in Pune. Minister of state for urban development, Ravindra Mane too, was indicted by the High Court in the scandal. Mane, who was forced to resign on moral grounds, was also involved in a similar case—reservation on a plot of land at Sangli—which was challenged by the court recently.

The list runs on:

• **Chief minister Narayan Rane:** As a revenue minister, he was made party in a case involving dereservation of land belonging to the Maharashtra Engineering Research Institute at Nashik. However, he was later dropped from the list of respondents.

• **Health minister Daulatrao Aher:** A writ petition was filed against him with regard to the purchase of MRI equipment for the J.J. Group of hospitals. The petitioner, Congress legislator Shantaram Aher, contends that the equipment was bought at a high price by the government.

• **Finance minister Mahadev Shivankar:** As an irrigation minister, he was probed on charges of awarding contracts in the Krishna Valley project. He was later cleared.

• **Horticulture minister Shobhatal Phadnavis:** Her alleged involvement in the multi-crore 'tur dal' scam as food and civil supplies minister resulted in her facing an inquiry. She was later acquitted of the offence.

• **Former agriculture minister Shashikant Sutar:** Forced to resign on corruption charges because of alleged involvement in unauthorised constructions. However, his name has been cleared.

With only six months left for the coming Assembly polls, the graft cases have come as a major setback for the coalition government. In fact, at a recent party workers' meeting, the normally arrogant and unflappable Sena chief, Bal Thackeray, seemed disturbed by the developments. Thackeray's worried prescription for the malaise was: highlight the government's achievements.

The government's discomfiture is the Opposition's joy. Highlighting the corruption charges against both Gopinath Munde and Babanrao Gholap, the leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, Madhukarrao Pichad, even led a delegation to Governor P.C. Alexander seeking Munde's ouster. Says Congress leader Chhagan Bhujbal: "This is a government of common thieves. The masses, too, know it now. Which is why we are the clear favourites for the next Assembly polls." Perhaps he's right. And if that happens, it'll be one inglorious exit for the ruling combine. •

Kanjal Walla/Bombay

RAKESH SINHA

JUST NOT RADICAL ENOUGH

The role of the Left in the current political crisis reveals that nothing has changed

The condition of the so-called secular, non-BJP formation in India is akin to the Hobbesian State: nasty, brutish and short. Confusion, ego, jealousy, sabotage, hatred, friction and conflict reign among the secularists. Those who have been exposed as being the worst-hit by this state of nature are the Left parties.

Hoping to be the catalyst for the unity among the secular formation and wanting to seize the captaincy of the unborn Third Front, the Left is now feeling humiliated, isolated and deserted. But whose fault is that? Consider their tactics. They preferred to shake hands with Jayalalitha instead of staying with M. Karunanidhi, a tried and tested ally. They welcomed Laloo Yadav instead of hitching up with Ram Vilas Paswan. They showered praise upon Mulayam Singh Yadav, whose erstwhile colleague Pappu Yadav, actually had a comrade, Ajit Sarkar, murdered.

The fault is not just with the tactics. Talk to Harkishen Singh Surjeet and he will spout high-minded gobbledygook about protecting secularism. But in fact, the game is all about power. After the 1996 election, Jyoti Basu did not camouflage his ambition of wanting to take over the reins of power, a wish which was dashed to the ground by hardliners in the party's central committee by a narrow margin. Basu termed this defeat a 'historic blunder'.

The 16th party congress in October 1998 endorsed the line of not participat-

ing in a non-Left Front-led government. So what happened to that line in 1999 when power beckoned? It is another matter that a party colleague let Jyoti Basu down.

As for the CPI, sample this. In the 17th party congress at Madras in September 1998, the party declared: "We will have to fight the Congress in all those states where it is confronting the Left or its allies. We cannot envisage the Congress usurping the political space that belongs to us and our allies." And what do they do? Get ready to support the Congress at the Centre.

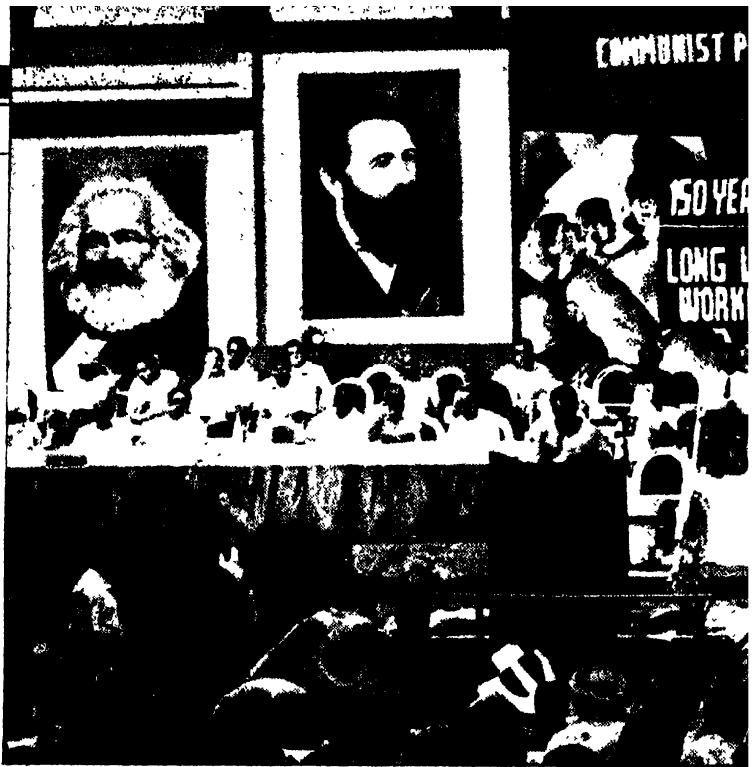
Left politics in India lacks imagination, innovation, courage and confidence. The 1999 episode reveals that they're caught in a time warp. They would like to do to the Congress today, what they did to the Congress Socialist

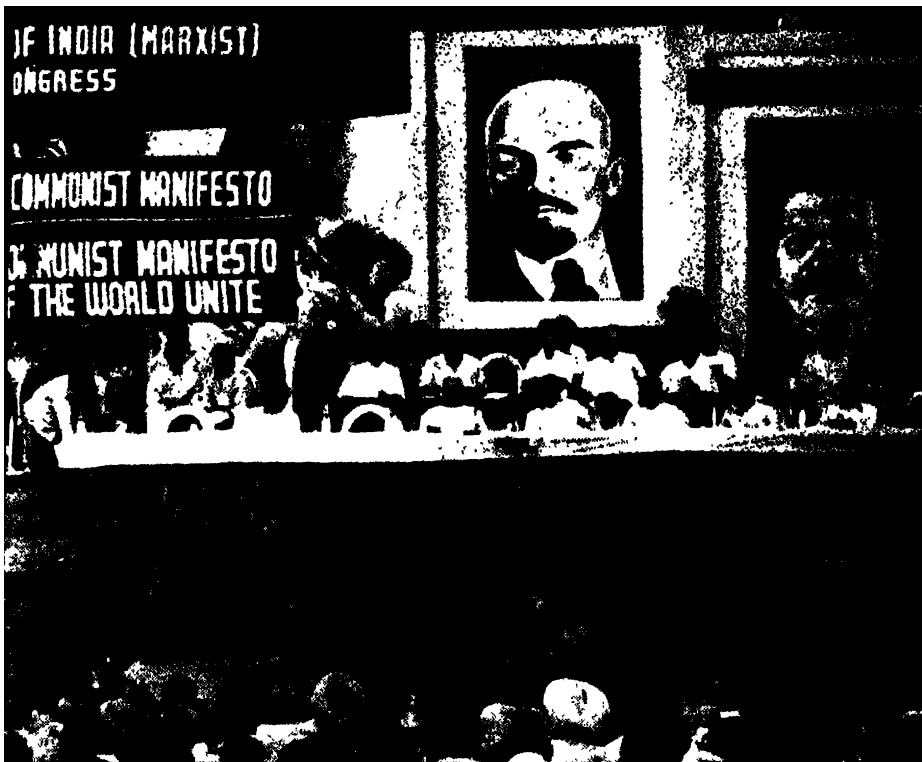
Party in pre-Independence India. Sajjad Zaheer, Soli Batliwala, Dinkar Mehta and E.M.S. Namboodiripad were elected to the national executive of the CSP in 1937-38. They were the Trojan Horses of the CPI. This led to a split in the CSP and ultimately the communists captured ready-made front organisations: the trade union (AITUC) and the student wing (AISF). This led to the CSP shutting its door firmly in the communists' face.

It was no surprise to anyone that the Leftist of the Cambridge school, Lord Mountbatten, should have been the intermediary between the Communist Party and Jawaharlal Nehru.

Nor did it seem ironical to anyone that the party's leadership should have come mostly from the Oxford and Cambridge-

The 16th CPI(M) party congress endorsed the line of not participating in a non-Left-led government. So what happened to that line in 1999 when power beckoned? It's another matter that a comrade let Jyoti Basu down





The 16th party congress of the CPI(M): endorsing the 'historic blunder'

educated Marxists. It remained so till the Seventies when Jawaharlal Nehru University began filling the space in leadership. Nehru wrote to Edwina Mountbatten: "You know I have had strong leanings towards communism and have many friends among communists." The P.C. Joshi line, offering all support to Nehru, was accepted but then the second party congress in 1948 criticised it as an "opportunistic slogan of a United Front between the government and the people."

However, the opposition to the Nehru-led Congress was tempered in the years that followed, with Left intellectuals playing a major role in this paradigm shift. But it did reveal one important aspect of the communist movement in India: that its centre of gravity did not lie within the organisation but outside it. In pre-Independence India, Rajani Palme Dutt and Ben Bradley who belonged to the Communist Party of Great Britain, guided the policy and influenced its political line. In post-Independence India, the CPI let itself be guided by Moscow while the CPI(M) turned to Beijing.

The post-Nehru crisis for leadership of the Congress propelled the CPI to make a bid to capture the Congress. Mohan Kumaramangalam, veteran CPI leader and son of P. Subbarayan, a minister in Nehru's Cabinet, proposed a thesis in 1965 which suggested "review of the party since 1947". The intention was

to infiltrate and capture the Congress from within.

Scores of communists joined the Congress in this period: Rajani Patel became the president of the Bombay Congress Committee. K.V. Raghunath Reddy, R.K. Khadilkar, Nandini Satpathy, Nurul Hasan, K.R. Ganesh, H.N. Bahuguna, Chintamani Panigrahi and others joined the Congress and became MPs. So, out of 350-odd Congressmen elected in 1971, more than 50 were originally from the CPI.

More recently, Nurul Hasan, Bipan Chandra, Romila Thapar, Irfan Habib, S. Gopal and other non-party Left intellectuals exerted their influence on the Left parties. They took a line which, for them, was an insurance policy yielding double benefit: they justified closer interaction with the Congress on the grounds that the Left movement would grow; and ensured their survival.

However, when the Congress reached a point where there was no space left for it to accommodate Left ideology anywhere, it found itself unable to sustain this alliance. We have now reached a situation where only unconditional support suits the Congress.

The 1998 manifesto of the Left parties denounced the Congress in the worst possible manner. "The Congress party has degenerated both politically and organisationally... it is a party riddled with corruption. The Congress is no more a party which can govern at the Centre or provide the country with a new agenda," these parties said.

The Congress should go into its new-found alliance with the Left with its eyes open. This time the Marxist onslaught will be on Sonia Gandhi's leadership. They will try to find "progressive elements" within the Congress to "defeat the reactionary leadership".

In 1978, the CPI(M) did the same with the Janata Party and the Congress. At its tenth party congress, it explored the idea of cultivating "elements and groups in the Congress(I) who are not only against the authoritarianism of Indira Gandhi but also tend to take radical postures on socio-economic issues". In the same breath, it appealed to the "Left and democratic forces in the Janata Party" for cooperation with the Left.

In 1978, the CPI admitted it had made a mistake in endorsing the Emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi in 1975. It turned so much that one of its leaders, Yogendra Sharma, was severely chastised and marginalised in the party as a punishment for carrying a letter from Indira Gandhi to Yuri Andropov, then President of the Soviet Union.

What is happening now? Once again, the known hardliners in the party don't want to share power without responsibility and another section wants direct share in power. This is the only difference between Sitaram Yechury and Prakash Karat on the one hand and Jyoti Basu and Harkishen Singh Surjeet on the other.

Communists are obsessed with their image of being character-certifiers. But the present political crisis and the subsequent polarisation has shattered that image. They've compromised with Laloo and Jayalalitha. They've accepted and legitimised Subramanian Swamy's guidance and his prescription for creating instability in the country.

The CPI is faced with a revolt in its Bihar unit for supporting Laloo. The CPI(M)'s cadres are confused: they've been brought up to believe the Congress is a bunch of corrupt, power-hungry politicians. So why is the CPI(M) supporting them?

There aren't too many avenues left for the Left. Maybe the time has come when it should accept its mistakes, make its functioning more democratic and transparent and do imaginative politics. Conspiratorial politics is self-limiting. •

(The author teaches political science in Delhi University and is associated with the sangh parivar. These views are however, his own).

Bullet for bullet

The Ranvir Sena, avenging the Senari massacre, guns down 12 Dalits in Bihar's Gaya district

In Bihar, gunfire has once again shattered the lull which had descended after the massacre of 35 upper-caste men (Bhumihars) on 18 March at Senari village in Jehanabad district. This time, guns were out in the Magadh heartland — in Khagribigha and Jahirbigha hamlets under Belaganj police station of Gaya district. On the night of 21 April, the outlawed Ranvir Sena men shot dead 12 people belonging to Dalit and backward castes. The latest round of carnage was apparently in retaliation to the Senari killings perpetrated by the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC), the banned Naxal outfit.

The modus operandi was the same. As in the past, killings were confined to the two small hamlets. The Ranvir Sena men, wearing green shirts and shorts, surrounded the unsuspecting villagers of Khagribigha at first. It was around 10 pm at night when the first shot was fired at Munari Devi, who was sleeping with her seven-year-old daughter Sharda Kumari. Munari had come to visit her brother Yadunandan Yadav.

The action commenced when a group of men, armed to teeth, stealthily reached Yadunandan's house. An attempt was made by the Ranvir Sena men to overpower him. But being physically strong, Yadunandan caught hold of one of the marauders and flung him hard on the ground. With this, he got the chance to escape under the cover of darkness.

But this act of defiance angered the Ranvir Sena men. They flung Yadunandan's six-month-old nephew in front of fettered buffaloes. The bovines, who were perhaps were more humane than

human beings, did not trample the infant who lay cushioned on the dung cakes.

Munari and her daughter were terrified at the unleashing of cruelty right in front of them. But they did not last for long. Both were silenced shortly after this. The duo's heads were blown off as more than six bullets were pumped in.

Meanwhile, hot on the trail of Yadunandan, Sena activists started to fire at random. More than 50 shots were fired. This proved to be a boon for the residents of Jahirbigha village which was nearby. Villagers, alerted by the sound from the blazing guns, ran away to Musi village, located nearby. Musi is a village



KRISHNA MURARI KISHAN



KRISHNA MURARI KISHAN

After the carnage at Khagribigha: death row



Sharada Kumari: the end came too soon

dominated, ironically, by the Bhumi-hars. But they were benevolent enough to provide refuge to the fleeing Dalits.

But the Sena men were not so kind. After killing Jawahar Yadav, a 70-year-old man who was sleeping in his *dalan* (outhouse), the assailants moved over to Jahirbigha. Caught in the confusion, and crossfire, 55-year-old Dashrath Manjhi was the first one to go down. He too was shot in the head, thrice.

Manjhi's family members were also shot dead while they were asleep. So was Tuleshwar Prajapati. This old and frail man was valiant enough to save the lives of six persons. According to eye-witnesses, when the Sena men started firing, Tuleshwar told his neighbours to go inside the house and bolt the door. While everyone took shelter in the safe confines of their house, Tuleshwar was left behind and eventually shot dead.

Even as the killers were trying to break open the doors in the villages,

Bihar may witness more carnages in the near future. This is because militant outfits like the People's War Group, the MCC, the Red Squad of the CPI(ML) and the Ranvir Sena have resorted to an expansion drive

the police patrol party in nearby Paibigha and Charta villages heard the commotion and also the sound of guns being fired.

Yadav also told SUNDAY that when a handful of upper-caste young men of Musi village decided to take on the Ranvir Sena men, who were on the rampage at Khagribigha and Jahirbigha, "We discouraged them as the killers had highly sophisticated weapons and they would not have stood a chance."

Speaking to SUNDAY, the superintendent of Police, Gaya, Anil Palta, pointed out that there was no dispute in the villages. "Logic fails as to why the Ranvir

Sena decided to kill innocent people, even as there was no dispute over anything here," said Palta.

The SP revealed that when the police patrol party started spotting the killers, they were busy trying to break open the door of a house where more than 25 persons had taken refuge. "The casualty would have been far more," he added.

According to the SP, after the massacre, raids were conducted in the probable hideouts of the Ranvir Sena and five persons have already been taken into custody so far. The state government has already started the procedure of granting ex gratia payment of Rs 1.4 lakh each to the next of kin of the deceased.

At the place of carnage, the leader of the Opposition in Bihar Assembly, Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) Sushil Kumar Modi, had to face an extremely hostile crowd. His political rival, RJD's Laloo Prasad Yadav and his wife, chief minister Rabri Devi, were going all out to convince the gathering of illiterate villagers as to how the BJP and the Samata Party were encouraging the Ranvir Sena.

Later, speaking to SUNDAY, the director-general of police, T.P. Sinha, pointed out that the police had recovered empty shells of 12-bore guns, 7.62-bore and 30.06-bore rifles. He revealed that an empty bottle of rum was also found. And that it was the brand supplied to the Border Security Force (BSF) in Punjab. Sinha said that this could lead to the source of ammunition and arms supplied to Ranvir Sena.

Meanwhile, with the killing of 12 men from the Dalit and backward castes, the Ranvir Sena, in its bid to even the score of the Senari carnage, has truly made its presence felt in the MCC bastion.

Intelligence reports say that the MCC had already started preparations for storming the Ranvir Sena bastion at Bhojpur. And other carnages in the near future are certainly not ruled out. Especially when the People's War Group, the MCC, the Red Squad of the CPI(ML) and the Ranvir Sena are on an expansion spree. •

Naved Zahir/Gaya

Local sentiments

The SAF football tournament turns out to be a damp squib

The South Asian Federation Football (SAFF) tournament has failed to enthuse spectators. To make matters worse, the Indian team made everything so controversial that a serious rethinking is needed regarding its composition.

As India decided to host the meet in Goa, the selection process took on a regional hue. Bruno Coutinho was named captain and Henry Britto the mana-

was heckled when he replaced Bruno Coutinho in India's match against Pakistan was unprecedented. And the Bangalorean just could not play!

A lot of the problems the Indian team faced were due to the absence of a strong coach. Sukhvinder seemed to just cave in to the demands of the manager and the captain. The captain's gesture to the crowd while leaving the field to be replaced would have earned him an immediate suspension in most countries. But in India, everything is possible.

In future, strength of character should be one of the main criteria for the selection of a coach. Singh is a good man, but needs to steel himself like Nayeemuddin, for example.

However, the Margao misadventure should be forgotten, now that the pre-Olympic matches against Thailand have to be prepared for. India is fortunate that quite a few of the under-23 squad have been in action in the SAFF cup competition, though their skills have to be blended with the others invited to the camp at Bangalore.

While P.K. Banerjee will be putting the boys through their paces, the All India Football Federation is sifting through the CVs of several coaches suggested by FIFA. AIFF president Priya Ranjan Das Munshi said that the federation might select two — for the juniors and seniors.

"In any case, our immediate aim is to do well in the home and away matches in the pre-Olympics in July. Only after this is over we will concentrate on the Asia Cup. In the next phase, we will be preparing a team for the Afro-Asian Games soccer competition," Das Munshi said.

Whatever the AIFF does, however, will have to have a clear direction in the matter of team selection and manager-appointment. Local sentiment cannot be allowed to take precedence over national interest, as was the case in Goa. •

Arijit Sen/Calcutta



Bruno Coutinho: unruly behaviour

ger. Unfortunately, the manager wanted to usurp the role of coach. His years as a club-level player might have given him the idea that he knew about tactics better than the coach, Sukhvinder Singh. Britto even decided to take on FIFA's nominee, P.K. Banerjee.

Although the stadium had a capacity of 35,000, there were not more than 10,000 spectators on any day in the league stage. But those present were enough to demonstrate the attitude of the public. They felt only Goan players should take the field. The way Carlton Chapman

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Attention Cricket Lovers

WEST BENGAL

Cruel lessons

A Jadavpur University student is kidnapped and tortured for taking part in campus movement

He implored his torturers: "Kill me." But they refused, saying, "We will send you back as a living example of what we can do." As the young man slowly recollected the ghastly tale in his hospital bed and narrated it with much difficulty to SUNDAY, there were intermissions when he stopped speaking and clasped his abdomen, trying to suppress the pain.

When Anish Dhar, a student from the north Bengal district of Cooch Behar came to study production engineering at Jadavpur University in Calcutta, little did he know that he would be in such a precarious condition in his second year.

But in an extreme turn of events, on 20 April, when he had gone to a shop near his hostel, he was accosted by five tough-

looking men. With little prelude they pressed their revolvers against him and dragged him by his hair on to an Ambassador car. He shouted for help, but in view of the increasing insecurity of people's life and dignity in the city, nobody responded.

They pressed his head down and started punching him. Nearing the Eastern Metropolitan By-pass, they blindfolded him. The car drove on for what seemed about 45 to 50 minutes before it stopped. He was dragged out and taken up to the first floor of a building. When his blindfold was removed he found himself in a room with armed men around him.

Then the beating started. It followed a peculiar pattern. For two days, Anish was kicked on the lower abdomen and lower back in long stretches. They seemed to be professionals in this

TERROR TACTICS: *Anish Dhar in hospital*

DESHKAI VAN CHOUDHURY



business.

"See what is the consequence of agitating against us," they taunted. It seemed they had been trailing him keenly for quite some time, for they kept on passing comments such as, "This is for your speech at the street-corner meeting at the 8B bus stand," as they thrashed him.

The charge against Anish was that he had taken a leading role in the ongoing agitation in the university against a recent circular regarding library fines. The fines were increased from 6 paise per day to 30 to 50 paise per day for students, and for the first time, were imposed on the teachers.

Apparently a small issue, it had blown up to alarming proportions with students and teachers demonstrating almost every day and the authorities refusing to negotiate. The students said the library was completely in the doldrums and the raising of fines would not help improve it in any way.

The engineering and science faculty unions organised hunger-strikes and sit-ins against the circular, while the CPI(M)-backed Students Federation of India (SFI), which controls the arts union, and the Karmachari Sansad, opposed it saying it was a disruptive move by Naxalites and other forces. This even led to an engineering teacher being assaulted on the campus and several students being injured in clashes. But something like Anish's abduction and torture was still beyond the worst imaginable scenario for most people.

Anish was not given anything to eat or drink and was not allowed to visit the toilet. Once, when he could not control himself, he was beaten particularly hard for having made a mess on the floor.

On the second day as the ordeal continued and his condition became delicate, they ordered him to sign a blank paper. He refused. One torturer started pulling his hair and another pulled his tongue out until he could no longer bear it and signed.

On 22 April morning, Anish was taken out in a car and dumped at a field near Calcutta Airport. He lay there for some time, dazed and writhing in pain. Seeing a rickshaw cart coming, he requested him to take him to the main road, where he found a taxi. Enquiring about the place, he came to know that it was the airport area and told the taxi driver to take him to the Salt Lake campus hostel of Jadavpur University. The students later admitted him to the NRS Hospital.

The news shocked the campus community at the university. Vice-chancellor Ashok Nath Basu issued a statement which was distributed in the form of a leaflet the following day. "Although medical reports say there is no external injury on Anish's body, he is being treated at the NRS Hospital," it said.

That, however, could not pacify the students, who demonstrated and ransacked the VC's office demanding security. The SFI and Karmachari Sansad, of course, saw a "Naxalite conspiracy" behind the episode.

The issue generated much heat at the general body meeting of the Jadavpur University Teachers' Association. While the majority section decided to adjourn the meeting and march to the VC to demand peace and security in the campus, about 50 of them refused to go and 'continued' the meeting.

Even as he became the issue of agitations and counter-agitations outside, Anish was still suffering from the trauma and pain at the hospital. And strangely, the doctors seemed to be mortally scared to talk about him. "We have orders from higher authorities not to disclose his condition to anybody," said one of them. •

Nilanjan Dutta/Calcutta

HUMAN RIGHTS

Justice delayed

Undertrials far outnumber convicts in Indian jails

Recently, a seminar was organised in Guwahati by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to celebrate the foundation day of the state Human Rights Commission (AHRC) in Assam. The subject of discussion was the "Systemic Reform of Indian Prison". Speaking on the occasion, NHRC special rapporteur and former director, investigation, Sankar Sen observed: "The presence of a large number of undertrial prisoners have made prisons in India overcrowded, failing the criminal justice system in our country."

Delivering the keynote address, Sen blamed the state governments for the lack of interest in implementing the recommendations made by the All India Jail Reforms Committee headed by Justice Mulla for improving the condition of prisons.

Sen pointed out that the number of prisoners in India was not very large compared to the total population. He informed that there were only 2.5 lakh prisoners in Indian jails out of whom around 60,000 were convicts while the rest were mostly undertrials. He said that if steps were taken to release the undertrials wherever it was possible, it would be easier to

Power struggle

Dunlop workers in Calcutta refuse to remain in the dark

The situation is fast approaching the point of no return for the employees of tyre major Dunlop. Workers at the company's distribution office at Calcutta's 62A Mirza Ghalib Street not only have received no wages for the past 14 months, on 24 March, power supply to the building was disconnected. The reason: the company was unable to pay electricity bills.

And with the supply cut-off, no pumps are operated and there is no water in the building. As a result, more than 100 employees are forced to go without power or water in the middle of a sweltering summer. Repeated appeals to the company authorities have fallen on deaf ears.

During a demonstration on 12 April, there were heated rhetoric and slogans, condemning the lack of concern shown by the management. The workers were demanding, among other things, the immediate restoration of electricity and water supply and the payment of outstanding salary. Speaking to newsmen, INTUC-affiliated Dunlop India Employees Union general secretary Aniruddha Sengupta pointed out that his group had decided to close ranks with the CPI(M)-affiliated union on the matter.

Moving a step further, CITU-affiliated Dunlop Workers' Union (DWU) vice-president Ashoke Pal announc-

improve the conditions inside the jails. For that matter, he even suggested setting up of a task force on a priority basis. "There are prisons in the country which are so overcrowded that the prisoners have to sleep in shifts. This often leads to unrest and riots among prisoners," Sen pointed out.

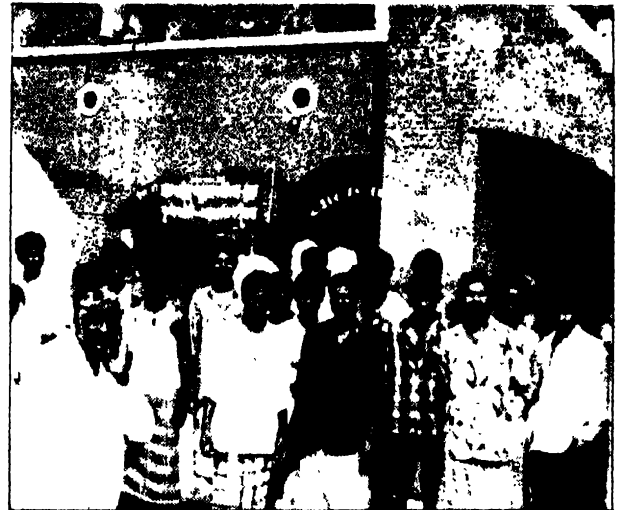
During its investigations, the NHRC has found that some undertrials had been languishing in jails for decades because the authorities could not arrange for escorts to take them to the court. Sen therefore suggested that the jail staff be trained for escorting prisoners instead of the police who were always overburdened with other duties including law and order.

It has been observed that the training of prison staff was a neglected area in all the states. Therefore a suggestion has been made to train the jail staff so that they can escort the undertrials.

It has also been found that tuberculosis was rampant in most of the prisons in the country. There were no adequate doctors or medical staff attached to prisons. Sen suggested that a prisoner should be admitted to a jail only after a thorough medical examination. In this connection, he called upon the NGOs to help the jail authorities. There were 300 cases of death in custody in India during 1995-96. The figure rose to 700 in 1996-97.

Incidentally, AHRC chairman Justice S.N. Bhargava pointed out that the condition of jails in Assam as well as in other north-eastern states were found to be not very encouraging by the Commission during its inspection on several occasions.

While the state inspector-general of prisons, H.N. Baruah informed that as on 26 February, there were a total of 6,177



HOUSE OF HORROR: file picture of a jail

inmates in Assam which included 108 women inmates. Out of them, there were a total of 4,606 undertrial prisoners.

Earlier, Governor Lt.Gen.(ret'd) S.K. Sinha said that the living condition in most of the jails in the country had become preposterous. He felt that "with criminalisation of the society, the life inside the jails has also become criminalised to an alarming proportion." •

Dileep Chandan/Guwahati

ed that his union was opposed to any kind of negotiation for reopening Dunlop as long as the company was under the control of its present owner Manu Chhabria.

Sengupta alleged that the present management had failed to ensure the supply of even the basic minimum facilities. When electricity could not be restored, the workers wanted to run the company's generator, installed in the building, for two hours everyday. But this was also turned down because it cost Rs 2,000 per day to run it. Sengupta has alleged that the Dunlop management took recourse to these inhuman measures even after giving an assurance,

SWITCH-OFF: workers at 62A Mirza Ghalib Street



on 6 April, to the additional labour commissioner, West Bengal government, that the matter concerning 62A Mirza Ghalib Street would be looked into.

Union sources pointed out that the authorities were deliberately not restoring the power supply. Ever since Dunlop announced suspension of work at its Sahagunj and Madras factories in early February last year, because of financial difficulty, negotiations have taken place to revive the ailing tyre manufacturer.

Workers had alleged that Dunlop's sickness was largely contrived and that the company was now trying to evict the workers from 62A Mirza Ghalib Street so that the prime property could be sold. Union sources pointed out that the workers were determined to stall the move.

Meanwhile, doubts are being raised as to whether the management will be able to put in place a viable revival plan which can take the company out of the woods. So far, these negotiations among the management, the state government, workers and the financial institutions, have not delivered any result.

As it stands, in order to retain its controlling interests, the Dunlop management will have to submit a revival package within 15 May. If this package is unacceptable to workers, banks and the state government, then the BIFR can reject it. In that case, the BIFR will ask its operating agency (in this case IDBI) to put forward a new plan. If such a thing happens, the management will no longer have a say in the affairs of Dunlop.

But that is a long-drawn process. Dunlop workers at 62A Mirza Ghalib Street, meanwhile, are sweating it out. •

Pradip Sanyal/Calcutta

Wagle's back!

And he is as funny as he used to be

Wagle is back, and that's good news for all those who like their humour gentle and unaggressive. For those who came in late, Wagle was the quintessential R.K. Laxman Common Man, whom Kundan Shah had given a face back in '87-88. He was an average joe, with an average job, leading an average life, unfailingly, however, his ability to focus on small joys left us smiling.

Wagle ki Duniya was a world we were all familiar with because it was our world, his problems, which ranged from a leaking tap and recalcitrant plumbers to bad-tempered bosses and unfriendly colleagues were our problems. Once every week, when Wagle and Radhika, his wife, arrived in our midst, we would want to see how he would deal with, say, one new TV set and many avaricious neighbours. Without, one may add, a raucous laugh-track.

Wagle ki Nayi Duniya (STAR Plus, Thursday, 8 pm) is



THE REGULAR JOE: Anjan Srivastava

similar enough to be reassuring. Anjan Srivastava reprises his role with the old felicity; so does Bharati Achrekar and they look amazingly the same, barring the odd wrinkle and an extra layer of flab. And Shah seems to have lost none of the edge in this serial (the intervening years have seen sparse output from the man who gave us the country's first genuine post-modern black comedy *Jeene Bhi Do Yaaron* — in the shape of the mostly wonderful *Nukkad* and the less-than-wonderful Shah Rukh-Suchitra Krishnamurthy film *Kabhi Haan Kabhi Na*. Wagle is as humane as he used to be and thanks be, as funny.

The expansion of the Wagle waistline was the chief event in an episode: his exercise regimen provided us with as much amusement as his furtive disappearance into the nearest Udupi joint. •

INNOVATION

High fashion

A fabric made from wood pulp holds out new promises

Shirts and skirts from trees? After 16 years of research, a fabric has been developed which promises to usher in a new era of eco friendly clothes. Billed as the fabric of the 21st century, Tencel was developed by Courtaulds which won the UN Fashion Industry and Environment Award for the product. This UN award is presented for environmentally responsible and sustainable business practices.

Asia's leading denim manufacturer Arvind Mills is the first one to bring Tencel to India. Tencel is a man-made cellulosic fibre derived from wood pulp which is harvested from managed forests. Cellulose is a natural polymer that makes up the living cells of all vegetation. And the manufacturing process uses a non-toxic solvent which is continually recycled.

As a natural fibre, Tencel is breathable, absorbent and, above all, fully biodegradable. The generic name of the fibre is lyocell and it lends itself to a variety of blends. Tencel's natural qualities enhance the inherent properties of wool, cotton, linen, silk, polyester, elastane and nylon. A variant, Tencel A100, has been developed primarily for the knitwear and jersey markets, by controlling the fibrillation at the fibre stage. Fibrillation is where the net fibre, through abrasive action, develops micro-fibrils — tiny fibres — on its surface. Manipulating or controlling fibrillation yield a variety of different fabric finishes.

Ushering in a new era in fibre manufacturing, Tencel is the result of perfect harmony between nature and technology. It is the first new product in 30 years. It is extremely strong in both its wet and dry states and is the first man-made cellulosic fibre for clothing to greatly exceed the strength of even wet cotton.

In addition to strength, Tencel has great versatility. It is inherently soft and smooth and, because of its strength, several different finishing techniques can be applied to produce a variety of unique surface effects in a wide range of fabrics. The fabric is so soft and pliable that it automatically provides grace, refinement and elegance. It is such an absorbent fibre that colour gets through easily, dyeing true to every hue.

Tencel could produce a range of fabrics, from uniforms and wearables to crepes, twills, chambrays and poplins. And most are machine washable or could be dry-cleaned. Since it combines the advantages of both natural and synthetic fibres, it is as soft as silk, as strong as polyester and as absorbent as cotton.

Combined with its durability, this product is being used for sports and casual outfits as much as for formal wear — in denims, woollens or cottons. Not only is it shrink-resistant, Tencel produces a fabric which "breathes", thus making it ideal for Indian weather conditions.

Arvind Mills is already supplying Tencel denim to eight leading brands — from Arrow, Charlie to Charagh Din, Hoffmen, Lee and Oxemberg. Fashion opportunities have begun to expand. The innovation is also likely to trigger more research into fabrics that take casual and the fashion-conscious even closer to nature. •

Arijit Sen/Calcutta



ARIES

(21 March-20 April)

Your free time and personal arrangements can be upset by the need to take on extra work. There's not much chance of finding peace and tranquillity at home. Household and family members can be in a quarrelsome mood. They may fail to undertake their share of duties and chores.

TAURUS

(21 April-20 May)

It will be difficult to stop money from rolling in. You are in for a successful and lucrative period where business and professional activities are concerned. Don't turn down any reasonable opportunity for earning extra cash. It seems that you are high in the list for promotion.

GEMINI

(21 May-20 June)

Keep some time for yourself. Take stock of your current position, and also clarify the direction in which you are going. You need to pit yourself against definite aims. Plan ahead, keeping long-term interests in mind. You may be suppressing your true desires.

CANCER

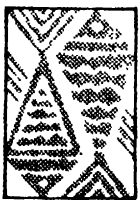
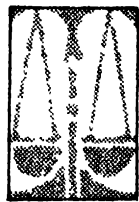
(21 June-20 July)

Material sacrifices may have to be made. Don't attempt risky ventures. People will know where they are if you stick to routine. Worries regarding romantic partners should be put to rest. Loved ones may tell you how important you are.

LEO

(21 July-20 August)

You may have to fend for yourself and depend on your own resources. It is probably not a good idea to lend money. Favouritism should be avoided in business. You cannot afford to grant special terms. Try a rearrangement at home: change around the functions of the main rooms in the house.



VIRGO

(21 August-20 September)

You may be entrusted with new responsibilities, accompanied by a substantial pay rise. Round off home decorations or other artistic enterprises. You are tempted to indulge extravagant whims: don't throw hard-earned money down the drain.

LIBRA

(21 September-20 October)

It will be easier to win others around to your way of thinking. Your relaxed and friendly manner will be infectious. People who are ill-at-ease will soon settle down. The diplomatic side of your nature will have some hard work to do. Domestic life needs to be given attention.

SAGITTARIUS

(21 November-20 December)

Stick to known and tried ways now. Utilise methods that others expect from you. Too much of an adventurous or innovatory spirit can earn you a reputation of being eccentric. Associates and clients are likely to be in a conservative mood, and will not take kindly to your varying behaviour.

CAPRICORN

(21 December-20 January)

This is not the time to sit back and take it easy. Keep abreast of all the necessary chores, tasks and arrangements. You cannot expect others to handle all responsibilities. You must shoulder your share of burdens. But it is again essential to allow others the time and space to make up their own minds.

AQUARIUS

(21 January-20 February)

Selfish motives can be ascribed to your attempts to help people in need or in trouble, by those who have no idea of what you are up to. But a welcome helping hand may come your way from well-placed people. Tutors are likely to be pleased with the progress of students.

PISCES

(21 February-20 March)

Too forceful a manner, and an overly single-minded intent to reach your goals, can be intensely counter-productive. It is better to do a little and assess the results rather than trying to accomplish things in one fell swoop.

Close shave

■ The former minister of state for finance, K. Janarthanan, escaped by the skin of his teeth. If the AIADMK had not pulled out of the government when it did, he might have been in serious trouble.

The story is that a deputy secretary in the finance ministry sought a posting and was prepared to pay Rs



K. Janarthanan: saved by the skin of his teeth

50,000 for it. Vigilance authorities got wind of the plan and a trap was laid for the minister, complete with inked notes, etc.

Just when they were ready to strike, the Prime Minister's Office got wind of it. Orders were sent that the operation must be stopped. And, just when the officers who had planned the operation considered defying this suggestion, the AIADMK pulled out.

Then the issue of giving or taking bribes became irrelevant.

Budget matters

■ The day the government fell, the finance minister told his bureaucrats that they should consider that he'd quit. But the

HEARD AT THE FINANCE MINISTRY

Yashwant Sinha is the only finance minister who is not worried about the Budget deficit, but about the parliamentary deficit.

A BUREAUCRAT

Budget hadn't been passed. So, how could this problem be surmounted?

The mandarins held a war council in the finance ministry which the minister attended for ten minutes. They told him that whatever the government did, the first thing was to get the Budget passed. The finance minister concurred. But what could he do if Parliament didn't realise the importance of passing the Budget?

Well, in that case, said the



Yashwant Sinha: seeing reason

CHECK-LIST

Chamber of horrors: what a Third Front government could look like

■ **Prime Minister:** Jayalalitha has said she wants the job. Need any more be said?

■ **Home minister:** Laloo Prasad Yadav. Noted for his sensitive handling of law-and-order issues, his efforts to protect Harijans in Bihar and his fodder-like integrity. Has demonstrated his commitment to women's issues by making his wife chief minister.

■ **Foreign minister:** Mulayam Singh Yadav. He doesn't speak any language other than Hindi but can adequately wrestle with the subtleties of foreign policy — don't forget he started out as a wrestler.

■ **Finance minister:** Subramanian Swamy. Noted for his maturity, his constructive streak, his unwillingness to speak ill of others and his helpful appearance before the Jain Commission investigating Rajiv Gandhi's assassination. Minister of state: why not Chandra Swami? How much worse could things get anyway?

■ **Defence minister:** H.D. Deve Gowda. Fresh from his triumph as prime minister of Hassan district, masquerading as Prime Minister of India, Gowda is now such an expert on defence matters that friends and enemies alike call him General Gowda.

bureaucrats...don't blame us later. No MP will be paid his salary.

The finance minister conveyed this sense of urgency to the Speaker and the Prime Minister. That's how the Budget was passed in record time.

There's a kind of hush

■ At the same meeting, the bureaucracy also told the finance minister that the three disasters they expected were that there would be a temporary disturbance in the Sensex; the issue of disinvestment which was to have been decided two weeks ago would continue to hang fire; and the new government — whichever it is — would increase subsidies. There was gloom all around.



Shankar Nath Acharya: where art thou?

But the one person, who manages to be missing from all such doom and gloom meetings was missing yet again: Dr Shankar Nath Acharya, chief economic adviser to the government. •

Vain effort

After she was widowed, for a long time, Sonia wore no ornaments at all. Then, gradually, as the grief abated, she was seen wearing small trinklets: nothing loud or flashy, but the odd gold bangle or chain round her neck.

However, for the week that the political crisis in Delhi was at its height, Mrs Gandhi was once again seen without any jewellery whatsoever. No earrings, nothing round her neck, no bangles, nothing except the vermilion threads around her left wrist.

The story is that M.L. Fotedar held a *havan* at 10



Sonia Gandhi: the *havan* failed to yield results

Janpath to assure success in all the ventures that Sonia Gandhi was undertaking. During the length of the *havan*, which went on for several days, the pandits told her that she should wear no jewellery except that vermilion threads which were tied round her wrist. She was not to take them off till Sunday, 25 April, when the auspicious period came to an end. After that she could go back to wearing jewellery.

Sadly, it doesn't seem as if the *havan* — and the strictures — yielded much.

HEARD IN THE CENTRAL HALL

This is the first time in history that a turkey has voted for an early Christmas.

A CONGRESS MP ON AMAR SINGH'S CLAIM THAT THE SAMAJWADI PARTY WANTS AN ELECTION

Watch your back

Subramanian Swamy, the one-man demolition squad, ironically blamed Arjun Singh for wrecking all his plans.

Swamy's explanation is unique. He was heard telling journalists that as a Brahmin, it was up to him and others like him, to do the thinking. "According to the Indian caste system, the Kshatriyas were only the people

who implemented and executed what the Brahmins thought," he said.

But when the Kshatriyas begin doing the thinking and the Brahmins begin doing the implementing, it is sure recipe for disaster. The Brahmin tried his best, he says, but there was a mistake in the plan.

Arjun Singh should watch his back. Because the back is what Swamy, the bravest of all fighters, aims for.

CHECK-LIST

Food and beverage management and the press: how political parties rate

■ **Samajwadi Party (9/10):** The best is not good enough, when it comes to feeding journalists. The best cakes and pastries, nachos and tacos, cold drinks, nothing but mineral water — certainly not a party of backwards when it comes to courting journalists.

■ **Samata Party (1/10):** Glucose biscuits and tea, sometimes savoury mixture. If you're invited to lunch, be prepared to pay for your food packet.

■ **Congress (5/10):** It is a standard fare — one sweet, one savoury and a cold drink or tea. But in moments of crisis, Congress MPs rise to the occasion by ordering lunch or dinner. The exception is 10 Janpath — you can wait for hours in the sun but you won't even be asked if you want a glass of water.

■ **Left parties (0/10):** Very, very limited. The Left doesn't believe in hospitality. You get tea and even that doesn't reach everyone.

■ **BJP (4/10):** Austere. Ask for a cold drink and the answer you'll get is that all the bottles are locked in the fridge. Tea and *dal muthi* is all you should expect.

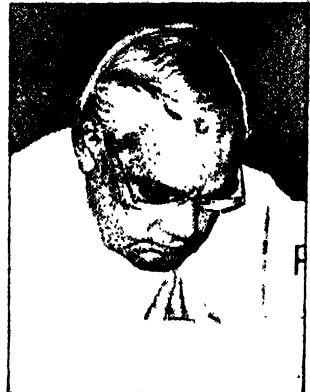
■ **Rashtrapati Bhavan (1/10):** Earlier they didn't ask you if you wanted water. Now there's provision for glasses of water, at least. Sometimes, you might get tea. But expect to burn to a crisp or freeze to death while you wait for a solution to a crisis.

Home front

Despite the BJP's show of optimism about being asked to form the government again, at least one man was more than keen to put this phase of his life behind him. On the Monday, following his defeat in the no-confidence motion, Atal Behari Vajpayee declared that he was ready to move out of Race Course Road.

This posed two problems. The first was manageable. The bungalow on Safdarjung Road that he wanted to move back into is currently occupied by Pramod Mahajan and therefore, not free. No problem, Mahajan would be more than willing to move.

But the second problem proved to be insurmountable. The SPG declared that as long as he was Prime Minister, caretaker or otherwise, it was obliged to provide a level of security that was only possible at Race Course



A.B. Vajpayee: wants to shift

Road. Ex-Prime Ministers have a scaled-down level of security which can be provided anywhere — but not sitting Prime Ministers. So, said the SPG director, he was sorry but Vajpayee was not going anywhere until his successor was sworn in.

Which means that Pramod Mahajan has a little more time at Safdarjung Road. •

The Kusum card

How was Kalpnath Rai won over by the BJP? Despite dire warnings to the contrary, Rai voted for the BJP government in the confidence vote. How did this happen?

It was UP chief minister Kalyan Singh who swung it. Despite his preoccupations, Kalyan Singh used the one weapon he knew wouldn't fail. Kusum Rai, the UP corporator and now chairman of the state social welfare board.



Kalyan Singh: master move

Rai, a close friend of Kalyan Singh's, has known Kalpnath Rai since her childhood. Her father and Rai were colleagues. Both families are Bhumihars. So the minute he heard Rai was threatening to defect, Kalyan Singh despatched Kusum to retrieve the situation. She sat at Rai's residence and announced she would not eat until Kalpnath had gone back to the side he rightfully belonged. As a result, Kalpnath Rai voted for the BJP.

Apparently with this single action, Kusum Rai has won over Atal Behari Vajpayee as well, who was on the verge of telling Kalyan Singh to choose between Rai and the chief ministership.

HEARD AT 24 AKBAR ROAD

First MP: It takes a genius to destroy the accumulated Congress goodwill of one year, in one week.

Second MP: No, it doesn't take a genius. It takes Arjun Singh.

A CONGRESS MP

Capital crisis

So over-heated was the political activity in the capital over the last week-end that residents of Delhi began to face two serious problems: one, the traffic jams that resulted when convoys

of various politicians with Z-plus security sped from place to place in search of a solution to who should rule India.

Second, one of the major mobile phone networks collapsed. For over eight hours, avid politicians and their

CHECK-LIST

If I became PM... What the candidates will do once they're sworn in

■ **Mulayam Singh Yadav:** Appoint Yadav Cabinet secretary, principal secretary and Chiefs of Staff. Arrest Mayawati on aesthetic grounds and send Amar Singh to Washington as our representative to the World Bank.

■ **George Fernandes:** Declare independence for Tibet, cut diplomatic ties with Burma, launch two missiles at China and then give interview to Karan Thapar blaming Vishnu Bhagwat for the mess.

■ **Jyoti Basu:** Establish diplomatic ties with USSR, on being told USSR no longer exists, announce aid package for Cuba instead, attempt to shift capital of India to Calcutta, on being told this is not possible, retires in a fit of pique.

■ **Chandra Shekhar:** Reconvene Jain Commission so he can again refuse to testify before it, ask the US if they want any refuelling for war against Serbia, declare Ghondal heritage resort and give many interviews saying, "Yes, I am a friend of Chandra Swami. What is wrong with it?"

■ **Sonia Gandhi:** Reconvene Jain Commission only to close it down once it turns out that it wants to re-examine her new ally Subramanian Swamy, invite Jayalalitha to tea only to withdraw invitation once the Raj Lady holds press conference saying, "No foreigner can become Prime Minister of India."

■ **A.B. Vajpayee:** Dramatically offer to resign and then trip L.K. Advani on way out of peace conference, declare that he's a statesman who wants to be friends with Pakistan before exploding four more bombs and launching six missiles.

hangers-on couldn't talk to each other unless their mobiles used landlines, because one network just couldn't take the traffic and broke down. Many messages which had to be conveyed were lost and communication lines snapped. What a disaster for India!

Settling scores

Why did Mulayam Singh Yadav change his mind and decide that the Congress could not be supported after all? There are many theories but the most plausible is this: Yadav was persuaded by his principal adviser and spokesperson, Amar Singh.

Singh has an old animus against Sonia Gandhi which relates to her unwillingness to give him any importance. Reporters on the Samajwadi Party beat recall how he would spend the post-press conference tea-time period railing against Sonia for refusing to acknowledge him: "Who does she think she is? My turn will come! etc., etc."

In the aftermath of Mulayam's turnaround, a gleeful Singh told all and sundry, "now she knows how important I am".

There is a second angle. Alert readers will have noticed that Singh is less angry with the Congress than with Sonia. This is believed to be a way of saying that he would not mind a Congress headed by Sharad Pawar with whom Mulayam Singh has an old nexus. It was Mulayam who introduced Pawar to Muslim leaders in 1996-97 in an effort to change his image and the two allied to fight the general elections in Maharashtra last year.

Lessons of this story don't underestimate Sharad and next time Amar Singh wants an appointment, give him one.

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TIMEBOUND
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- 33.49 lakh hectares of additional irrigation potential being created. 5 Irrigation Development Corporations set up for the purpose.
- Work towards 'Tanker free Maharashtra' in full swing. Eleven districts are already 'Tanker free'. Rs. 1473 crore spent to ensure water supply for more than 17,000 villages.
- Abundant power generation : Maharashtra leads the country. Capacity addition being achieved through conventional and non-conventional power projects; major concessions being granted to farmers in electricity dues.
- First time in Asia: successful lake tapping at Koyana reservoir to generate 1000 MW electricity.
- Successful organisation of "Advantage Maharashtra". A whopping 11.09% of the total national investment projected is for Maharashtra alone.
- Prices of five essential commodities frozen at 1995 level : The State pumps in Rs. 1000 crore for the common man when the rest of the country witnesses price rise. Wheat and Rice will now be sold at Rs. 2 per kg. to people below poverty line.
- More than 12 lakh toilets already constructed for women in rural areas. The state boasts of 40% of total rural toilets constructed in the country.
- Jeevandayee Arogya Yojana : New life to the poor by way of financial aid for medical treatment like heart surgery, kidney transplant.
- Military Schools coming up in each district : Inculcating Martial spirit, Nationalism and Discipline in the new Generation.
- Maharashtra celebrates the Year of Information Technology : And takes off into the New Millennium.

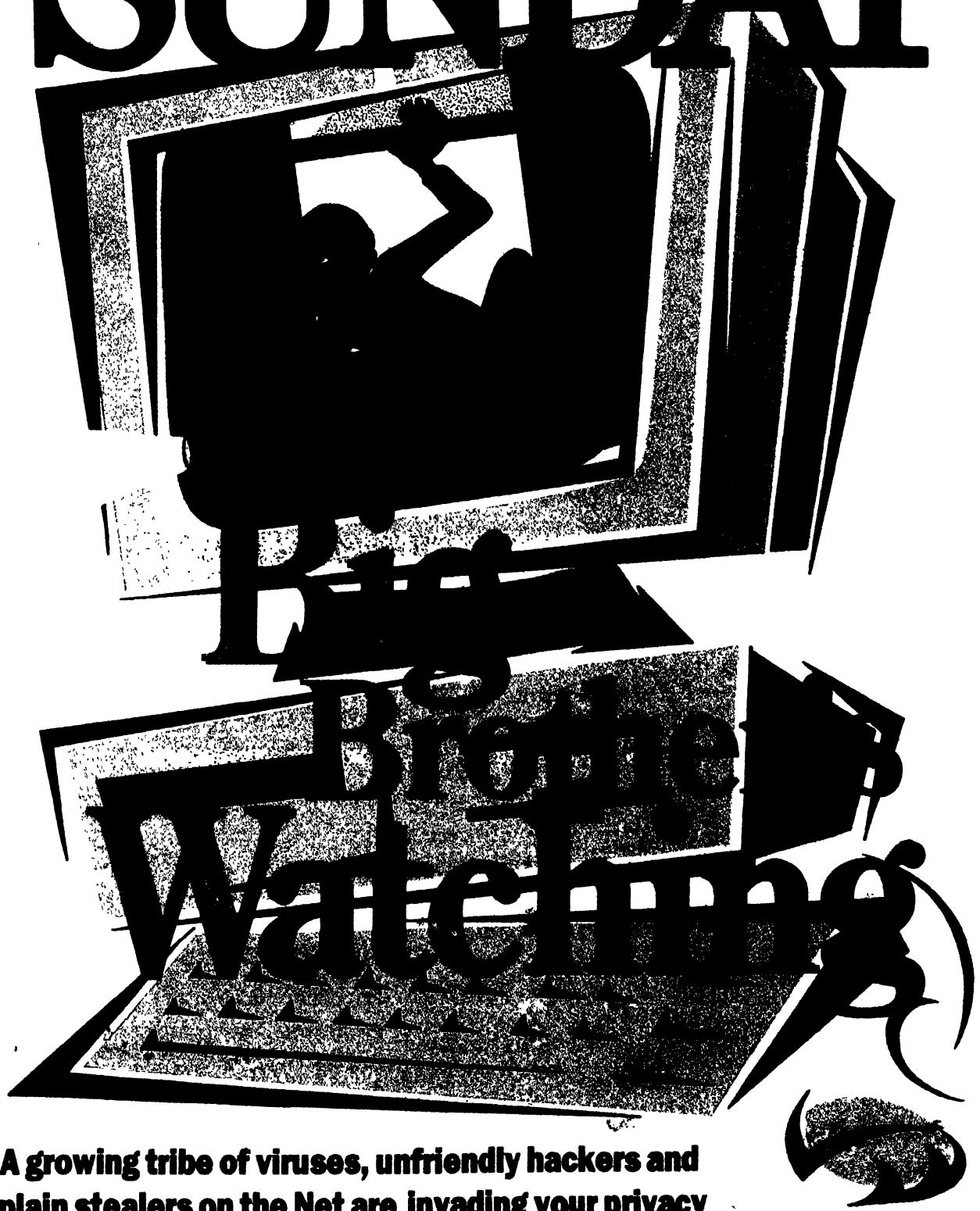


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WHO WILL CLAIM UP AND BIHAR THIS TIME?

SUNDAY



A growing tribe of viruses, unfriendly hackers and plain stealers on the Net are invading your privacy

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Letters.....	4
Sight and Sound.....	6
Seen.....	7
Profile.....	26
Spotlight.....	36
News.....	59
Sunday Week.....	63
Business Diary.....	64
Random Notes.....	65
Delhi Diary.....	66



THEATRE

At home, with English

Desi themes performed in the Queen's language are attracting theatre buffs in India..... 40

COLUMNS

MANI-TALK
Mani Shankar Aiyar 8

POWER PLAY
Rajiv Shukla 11

Cover artwork: Subin Das



COVER STORY 12

Big brother's watching

A growing tribe of viruses, unfriendly hackers and plain stealers on the Net are invading your privacy



INTERVIEW 30

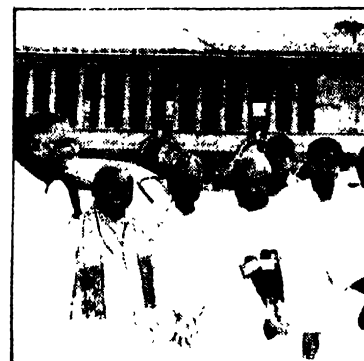
"The exile is over"

V.P. Singh on the political situation and his role in it

POLL-TALK 33

Preparing for the polls

The BJP leadership has to examine the ground realities before kicking off the election campaign





Madam's mistake

This refers to the cover story *Victory?* (25 April—1 May). Given the composition of the Lok Sabha and its delicately balanced arithmetic as reflected in the trust vote on 17 April that saw the downfall of the Vajpayee government, the abject failure of the major players in the Opposition camp to agree on what looked like the only viable arrangement possible forced an election on the country.

Sonia Gandhi cannot absolve herself of the blame for causing the ouster of the Vajpayee government. The Congress leadership has made the Himalayan blunder in dislodging the BJP-led government as the party has failed to cobble up a majority to form a viable alternative. The party has to pay a heavy price for it in the forthcoming election. Sonia made the wrong calculation that Jayalalitha's withdrawal would help her in forming an alternative government. But unfortunately, all their efforts came to nought.

One wonders why the Congress has suddenly strayed itself from the Pachmarhi Resolution. The electorate mustn't spare the Congress for the present political mess-up.

Prabir Ghosh, Calcutta (West Bengal)

■ Sonia Gandhi's outing as a political leader has been a failure. Sonia Gandhi took the right decision in reviving the party instead of pulling down the Vajpayee government in the Pachmarhi Conclave. But she must be held responsible for the present political imbroglio. Her own reflexes and acumen have proved inadequate to meet the exigencies of a fast-changing political scenario. She has not been well served by her advisers. In fact, the first veritable crisis has exposed the distortions in the decision-making system she has put together. She has made a numbers of serious miscalculations complicating the task of forming an alternative government at the Centre. The prospects of Sonia Gandhi becoming Prime Minister look rather doubtful now.

Sudha Trehan, Bombay (Maharashtra)

Sonia Gandhi: got her sums wrong

Switching sides

AIADMK supremo Jayalalitha has learnt the lesson the hard way: brinkmanship never pays (*Ms unpredictable*, 11—17 April). For Jayalalitha, one week is long enough to overturn her political fortunes and convert rapturous victory into numbing defeat. She has spent a few lakhs in hotel bills and an immeasurable erosion in credibility. While she achieved her goals in pulling down the Vajpayee government, which effectively split the DMK-led front in Tamil Nadu, by failing to put together an alternative government as she had promised, she has imperilled her political future.

The manner in which the Congress and other Opposition has squabbled for power and with Jayalalitha herself switching sides between the Third Front and the Congress, the Amma is left with

something — the image of a wrecker.

Bimal Chaudhury, Muscat (Oman)

■ Jayalalitha may be unpredictable, but she has own agenda and to achieve her objectives, she probably does not care for others.

Jayalalitha has made use of the numbers game to her best advantage. She has got more media coverage than most of other leaders. She is perhaps projecting a picture to show that she and her party are more important than others. In fact, she is an incorrigible megalomaniac and the political turmoil was deepened by this irresponsible lady.

A Jacob Sahayam, Nellore (Tamil Nadu)

Bihar bungle

This refers to the story *Loss of face* (7—13 March). After the revocation of President's Rule in Bihar, political commentators have come out with various reactions such as 'saving face but losing authority', 'democracy has lost' etc, but one thing is very clear that any elected government in any state cannot be removed simply because its presence is inconvenient to its opponent.

The distress over Bihar's condition was not the only reason which inspired the coalition government at the Centre to go in for President's Rule. The way the Centre went about the whole business in tackling Bihar crisis betrays its complete disregard for the democratic principle of parliamentary accountability. The central government mishandled the situation, miscalculated its own strength and limitations and ignored its position in Rajya Sabha.

The people of Bihar are the only losers.

Onkar Chopra, New Delhi





Harkishen Singh Surjeet: villain of the piece?

Historic catastrophe

This refers to the story *Left in the middle* (25 April—1 May). I don't agree with the writer's view that CPI (M) general secretary Harkishen Singh Surjeet deserves to be awarded the 'politician of the April crisis'. The hypocrisy of the Left has been exposed and in the name of resisting the 'communal forces', the veteran Left leader has muddled the whole thing. He is actually the villain of the piece.

True, by not allowing Jyoti Basu to become the Prime Minister in 1996, the CPM politburo made the 'historic blunder'. But the party's inept handling of the political situation arising out of Jayalalitha's withdrawal of support can be termed as historic catastrophe.

Priya Tandon, Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh)

Misleading Information

This has reference to the story *Thrown to the winds* (25 April—1 May).

It is shocking that your correspondent is not even aware

that Alliance Air is headed by a managing director, who currently happens to be a deputy managing director of Indian Airlines. He is Capt. J.R.D. Rao. Capt. Shakti Lumba, one of the senior executive pilots of Indian Airlines with an unblemished flying record, heads the operational wing of Alliance Air in his capacity as an executive director.

The fleet of Alliance Air is maintained in absolute air-worthy condition and moreover, age of the aircraft is not the key determinant factor in matters of flight safety. Your correspondent displays an absolute disregard for norms of ethical journalism by using the words 'so old and creaky that they give the impression that they will fall off the sky.'

The various instances cited by your correspondent as violations of flight safety have been investigated by the Director General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), who has not passed any strictures on the management of Alliance Air. If any individual has committed any transgressions, the management has taken appropriate disciplinary action.

The references relating to appointments of personnel

on contract are based on the misleading information provided to the correspondent by some vested interests.

Alliance Air follows a policy of contractual appointment based on competence and suitability of the candidate. The DGCA, which is the regulatory authority for all matters pertaining to the licensing of highly skilled category of personnel such as engineers and pilots, has not placed any restrictions on the appointment of superannuated personnel.

R.N. Pathak, director (public relations), Indian Airlines, New Delhi

Give it a thought

That Sachin Tendulkar had to be out of the field for his back pain was largely due to the gruelling schedule that the BCCI has set for the cricket players (*Cricket fatigue*, 4—10 April). However, the ace batsman has come back and one hopes Sachin will give out his best.

I personally feel Sachin must bat a little down the order, because the English conditions may not be condu-



Sachin Tendulkar: should he open the Indian innings in the World Cup?

cive to his opening the Indian innings. In the heavy over-cast condition of the early summer in England, where the ball is continuously seaming, India cannot afford to lose Sachin early. The team management must give a thought to it.

Anjana Bagchi, Siliguri (West Bengal)

SEPARATED AT BIRTH?

PRIZE RS 200 FOR CONTRIBUTIONS



Bhabanath Bhattacharya



Subarnendu Bhattacharya

Contributed by Bhabanath Bhattacharya, Calcutta (West Bengal)

In an item Out of retirement (4—10 April) in *Business Diary*, we had referred to Mr S. Rajagopal as consultant to Enron. Mr Rajagopal is not and has never been consultant to Enron or its Indian arm, the Dabhol Power Company.

The error is regretted.—Editor

MILESTONES

DIED: Swami Jogananda Maharaj, 101, Bharat Sevashram Sangha president, at Calcutta on 29 April.

DIED: Manmohan Adhikary, 79, former Nepal PM and president of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxists-Leninists), at Kathmandu on 26 April.

DIED: Mohan Gokhale, 46, theatre and television personality who shot into fame with the serial *Mr Yogi*, at Madras on 29



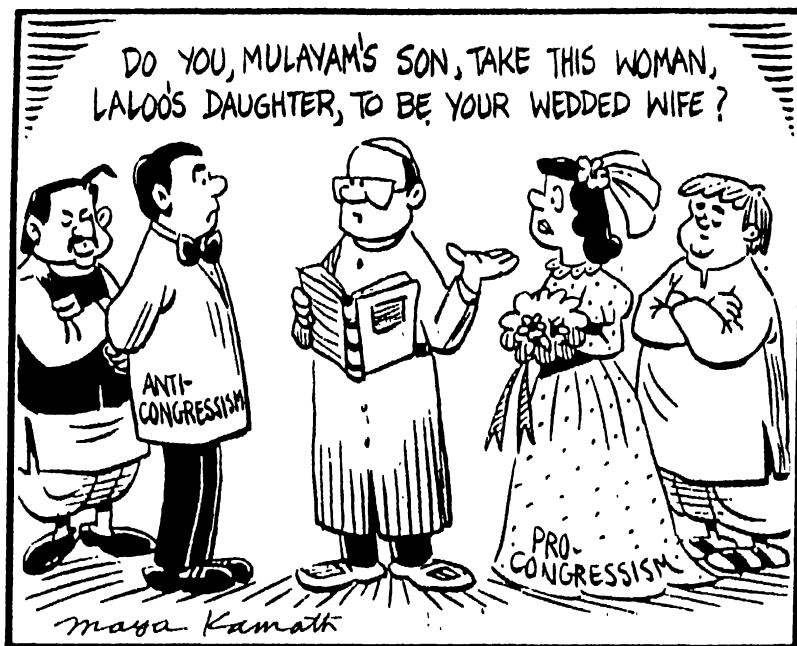
April. He is survived by his actress wife Shubhangi Sanghvi.

DIED: Kidar Sharma, 90, veteran scriptwriter, producer and director, at Bombay on 29 April. Some of his well-known films are *Devdas*, *Vidyapati*, *Sapera*, *Aulad*, *Chitrlekha* and *Arman*.

ARRESTED: Jitenjit Gogoi, alias Jayantajit Gogoi, a senior ULFA functionary, in Guwahati, on 28 April. Gogoi was intercepted while he was moving in a rickshaw. The arrest deals a severe blow to the outfit's publicity apparatus.

RESIGNED: Kuldip Singh, former Supreme Court judge, as president of the World Sikh Council in protest against Bhair Singh's removal as Akali Takht jathedar.

SIGHT & SOUND



MAYA KAMATH: THE ASIAN AGE

■ Democracy is not a matter of numbers. There has to be some policies and programmes.

ATUL BEHARI VAJPAYEE, Prime Minister

■ There are some imposters of secularism; Mr Yadav is one of them.

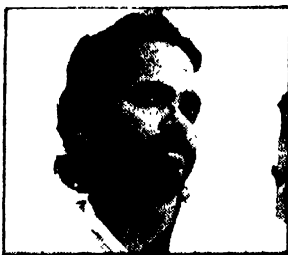
ARJUN SINGH, CWC member, accusing the Samajwadi Party chief of having a nexus with the BJP

■ This remark from a leader of a fascist party is music to my ear.

SUBRAMANIAN SWAMY, Janata Party president, after L.K. Advani called him a khalnayak

■ Change at times looks good but Azharuddin has won many matches for us.

KAPIL DEV, former India captain, when asked if Ajay Jadeja would have been a better choice to lead the side in the World Cup



■ That kind of shifting experience is important to me. It gives me distance from both places and makes everything new every time I go back and forth. It's a purposeful alienation.

VIKRAM CHANDRA, award-winning author, who spends half the year in India and the other half teaching in the USA, explaining how distance is essential to his writing

■ Thirteen months isn't enough to judge you. I was just getting to know about parliamentary proceedings.

OMAR ABDULLAH, National Conference MP, one of the first-timers in the Lok Sabha

■ If Mr Vajpayee's government can be called barbarous, there is nothing wrong in telling the truth about Mrs Sonia Gandhi.

MAMATA BANERJEE, Trinamul Congress chief, in defence of the BJP campaign that describes Sonia Gandhi as a foreigner

SEEN

LISTENING TO VIKRAM

A genius comes to Delhi



RUPINDER SHARMA

TUNING IN TO THE TENOR: Vikram Seth at the launch of *An Equal Music* at Delhi's Habitat Centre

If the world of Indo-Anglian literature is to be seen in Hollywood terms, then Salman Rushdie is our Francis Ford Coppola, loud, prolific, mercurial, aggressive and full of strong opinions about everything. But Vikram Seth is our George Lucas, a man who does much less than Rushdie but who does it to perfection, who has little to say to strangers and who retains a quiet intensity.

So it came as something of a surprise to see Seth on stage at Delhi's Habitat Centre. It was a book reading, organised by Penguin to launch *An Equal Music* in India and the organisers had underestimated Vikram's popularity. The auditorium seats 540 but 15 minutes into the reading, the audience numbered 750. At first, Penguin let people crowd the aisles and stand at the back. But then fire regulations came into play and the doors were shut leaving Delhi's loud and beautiful people fuming.

Inside, Seth was charm itself. At dinner the night before, he had been quiet and low-key with a table of ten persons. But today, faced with an audience of 500 plus, he brought an intense intimacy to his reading to the extent that each member of the audience felt that Vikram was talking only to him or her.

The charm was most apparent when he took questions at the end. Most were silly but he treated every questioner with a grave good humour. "How does it

feel to be on top of the world?" asked a man from the balcony. "At the moment, sir," replied Seth, "you are at a considerably higher level than me."

There were some revelations. He still sees himself as a poet: "One's own view of oneself is usually a few years behind the times," he joked. He is a trained Indian classical musician but immersed himself in Western music for the book. He is, predictably, tired of the stories of a rivalry with Rushdie. And he is sensitive about people mangling the titles of his books. At Star News, the day before, he recalled, the anchor called the book *An Unequal Music*. Vikram retaliated by getting his name wrong: "Oh, thank you Sudeep." (At the party afterwards he completed the story: "And, of course, Raj-deep said we'll have to record that bit again.")

But then, that's Seth. What can you say about a man who writes the definitive California novel — in verse? Who then comes back to write *A Suitable Boy*? And who follows its success with *An Equal Music*, a novel set in Europe without a single Indian character? And who makes a success of all of them?

As one reviewer of *An Equal Music* asked: "Is there anything Vikram Seth cannot do?"

Judging by that evening: No. He can do it all. And he does it brilliantly. •

Vir Sanghvi/New Delhi

At dinner the night before, he had been quiet and low-key. But today, faced with an audience of 500 plus, Seth brought an intense intimacy to his reading

What wrong did this



You might have seen the full-page ad, financed no doubt by Pramod Mahajan's doubtful cronies, asking the anguished question, alongside a

photograph of Vajpayee: "What wrong did this man do?" Thank you for asking the question. Here are the answers:

- Inaugurated the politics of principle by tying up with Jayalalitha after having repeatedly accused her of corruption.
- Flaunted this as the beginnings of a government with a difference, which would be based on pre-poll alliances, not the "khuchdi sarkar" of the Third Front vintage.
- Shared a platform in the election campaign with Jayalalitha who proclaimed that as soon as the alliance came to power, Karunanidhi's state government would be dismissed; as the audience hooted and shouted its approval, sat beaming like the Buddha instead of reading her a lesson on the limitations of Article 356.
- It was the mid-campaign Coimbatore bomb blasts, trumpeted as an "assassination attempt" on Lal Krishna Advani, which turned the tide of public opinion in the direction of the BJP-AIADMK; announced that no stone would be left unturned to capture the assailants, only to forget all about it after the ballot-boxes were closed, much to the fury of Amma; connived, instead, at the retribution launched on innocent Tamil Muslims all over the state by the Karunanidhi government.
- Although holding only around 190 seats in favour of the pre-poll alliance, accepted with power-hungry alacrity the President's invitation to cobble together a post-poll majority, in stark contrast to Rajiv Gandhi's dignified refusal to



ATAL BEHARI VAJPAYEE

man do?

400 days of wrongdoing

resort to such sleights of hand when asked by President Venkataraman in November 1989 whether he would attempt to do so as the single largest party.

- Scattered his agents around the capital and the country to seduce those who had opposed the BJP at the hustings to now join hands with the BJP to keep him in the Prime Minister's Office.

- Portrayed to the media, through his army of Goebbels's, Jayalalitha's concern at such unprincipled post-poll alliances as biting the hand that was feeding it, causing her to withhold for a while from Rashtrapati Bhavan her letter of consent, as a reminder to the Prime Minister that it was she, not some Badal-come-lately, who was his pre-poll ally and the one responsible for giving him the bonus of seats that had taken him within kissing distance of Race Course Road.

- Abandoned the manifesto on which the BJP had gone to the people, including such long-standing positions of principle as on Article 370, the

- ▲ Uniform Civil Code, constitutional protection for minority rights in education, and, Jai Shri Ram, "*mandir wahin banayenge*".

- Drafted a so-called National Agenda of Governance that skirted every issue on which the coalition repeatedly came a cropper over the next 13 months, and

Vajpayee shared a platform in the election campaign with Jayalalitha who proclaimed that as soon as the alliance came to power, Karunanidhi's state government would be dismissed; as the audience hooted and shouted its approval, sat beaming like the Buddha instead of reading her a lesson on the limitations of Article 356



L.K. ADVANI



JAYALALITHA

Through his rivalry with his home minister, Vajpayee sowed the seeds of competitive nepotism which, over time, paralysed the functioning of the government, substituted factionalism for governance and eventually undermined the integrity of the establishment

deceived his main coalition partner — Jayalalitha — about the issue of greatest concern to her and her state, namely, the implementation of the interim award of the Cauvery Tribunal.

- Appointed to his Council of Ministers a number of coalition personalities known to have charges framed against them in the courts of law; selectively sacked them when there was a howl of public protest; but retained as home minister the first occupant of North Block ever to have a criminal case pending in a court of law; and shunted off to Shastri Bhavan another of those charged with criminality in a criminal court.

- Through his rivalry with his home minister, sowed the seeds of competitive nepotism which, over time, paralysed the functioning of the government, substituted factionalism for governance, and eventually undermined the integrity of the establishment.

- Lit the long-prepared fuse for Pokhran-II, leading within 17 days to India falling within range of the Pakistani nuclear arsenal, thus shutting up the arrant nonsense heard in the interim 17 days from the home minister of nuclear hot pursuit over the Line of Control in Kashmir, the parliamentary affairs minister's challenge to Pakistan to enter India's nuclear *akhara*, the defence minister's boast of taking on China — India's Enemy No. 1 — and the Prime Minister's wholly unwarranted apologia to the US President which neither forestalled the

restoration of J&K to the agenda of the UN Security Council, nor Jaswant Singh's *shashtang namaskar* before Strobe Talbott, nor India's isolation in the Non-Aligned Movement.

- Armed though he might be with nuclear might and missile muscle, our very Rustom of a Prime Minister then started falling prey to the pin-pricks of his allies: no whim was so passing, no fancy too light for him to start despatching emissaries to appease, placate, roll back and compromise.
- The one ally who held out was the first and truest: what, she asked, about the Cauvery? The Prime Minister, annoyed that her question had caused him to trip at Red Fort, reached over her head to arch-foe Karunanidhi and sewed up with him a wholly fraudulent deal that enabled him to keep his tryst with destiny at the Independence Day flag-hoisting but not deliver a drop of tribunal-granted water to Tamil Nadu. Jayalalitha twice denounced the deal; he decided that her protests could be put on ice by threatening her with the continuation of the court cases.
- No such inhibitions, however, about a post-poll ally, the Akali Dal. With cavalier disregard of the promises made to the good people of Uttarakhand, the fate of Uttar Pradesh was sought to be decided in Chandigarh.
- And to keep the Samata Party in good humour, Article 356 was perverted till the manoeuvre was stalled by the timely intervention of the President.
- Meanwhile came the Budget, a fairy tale of figures proved over the next 12 months to be guileless fiction or deliberate falsehood.
- As economic policy lurched between the imperatives of the Swadeshi Jagran Manch and the demands of the IMF/World Bank, India turned in its worst economic performance since Yashwant Sinha was last finance minister: growth stultified; industry remained mired in recession; exports stagnated; foreign investment dried up; domestic investment tottered; infrastructure folded up, confidence cracked; and the Sensex gave up the ghost. The finance minister then turned soothsayer, predicting recovery for



YASHWANT SINHA

As economic policy lurched between the imperatives of the Swadeshi Jagran Manch and the demands of the IMF/World Bank, India turned in its worst economic performance since Yashwant Sinha was last finance minister...Prices soared. Not the prices of the luxury goods bought by Pramod Mahajan's bosom companions, but of the onions and the potatoes, the cooking oil and the basic necessities of the poor, all through last year's long, hot summer

every next quarter, then swallowing his words without compunction.

- Meanwhile, prices soared. Not the prices of the luxury goods bought by

Pramod Mahajan's bosom companions, but of the onions and the potatoes, the cooking oil and the basic necessities of the poor, all through last year's long, hot summer. No action was taken because the fat cat traders of the *sangh parivar* were making a quiet bomb.

- Retribution struck at the November elections: ousted from Delhi state and Rajasthan, the BJP's dreams went awry in Madhya Pradesh too.
- The RSS struck back. Vajpayee retaliated. The eternal bickering among the allies now yielded ground to the Mahabharata between the *mukhauta* and his *parivar*.
- The time to govern had come; *ergo*, the time to sack the naval chief and the finance minister's adviser. This the bold Vajpayee proceeded to do. Jayalalitha squeaked. Jayalalitha who? answered our knight chevalier. The fat was in the fire.
- The *sangh parivar* too retaliated: churches went up in flames, innocent tribals were targeted, a missionary and his sons were roasted alive; the Prime Minister called for a national debate on a closed subject and the home minister exculpated the suspects before the investigation had even begun.
- So, Vajpayee, to escape his woes at home, took a bus to Lahore. Actually, not quite to Lahore, only up to Wagah. Wah! Wah! Ahem, what next? All shadow, no substance; all stick-work, no goals; all foreplay, no love.
- To thunderous applause from a bemused nation, Vajpayee returned from Lahore. Nemesis struck with relentless force. Guruswamy spilled all in *The Asian Age*. Bhagwat talked to the Press Club. It was the end of the beginning and the beginning of the end.
- Bluff their way through Parliament as they might, the Lady declared she was not for the burning.
- The end came because the ally who had given the BJP its strongest support base, the only pre-poll ally of significance, the symbol of the Government with a Difference proved it to be more a Government of Differences. ●

Problem of plenty

It will again be a combination of alliances ruling the nation



It is almost certain that no party will be contesting alone in all the states during the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections. A combination of alliances will be ruling the nation again. The

two national parties — the Congress and the BJP — have already started negotiating with regional parties.

The Congress is the only party which will be contesting nearly 450 seats in all the states. Although the BJP has been in power at the Centre for 13 months, it could not increase its organisational base throughout the country. The party will only be contesting around 325 seats leaving more than 200 seats for the allies. This is most unfortunate for the nation as after the elections these regional parties start bargaining and blackmailing instead of giving their support. Both the parties will have to keep national interest in mind.

In the interest of healthy democracy in India, it is essential that there should be only two political blocs. One led by the Congress and another by the BJP. This will not only provide stability but also decrease the influence of caste and regionalism in the country.

If you pick up the manifestos of both the parties, it would be difficult to make out the difference. By finding Ayo-dhya's reference one can identify the BJP manifesto. But as far as foreign policy, economic policy and other issues are concerned, both are very similar.

I was worried when Jyoti Basu's name was floated for the prime minister-ship. He may be a nice person with pragmatic views, but he represents an ideology. We would have given to the world the message that India is being ruled by communists.

When the whole world is throwing them away, we were going to embrace them. Accepting communist rule means rejecting all the efforts made by national parties during the last one decade, includ-



Voters in the queue: protecting democracy

In the interest of healthy democracy in India, two political blocs are essential. One led by the Congress and another by the BJP. And this will provide stability

ing the economic reforms. It is ridiculous that much before the CPI(M) politburo's approval, Basu was quite keen to become the Prime Minister.

In the forthcoming elections it seems that the BJP will have alliances with the same parties — the Akali Dal, Samata Party, Biju Janata Dal, Shiv Sena, Lok Shakti, Arunachal Congress, Rajiv Congress, MDMK and Trinamul Congress — except in Tamil Nadu and Haryana.

In Tamil Nadu it may forge an alliance with the DMK and in Haryana with Om Prakash Chautala by dumping Bansi Lal. It means there will be 11 allies with the BJP. These allies will definitely create problems for the BJP if it stages a comeback.

Similarly, the Congress will have to ally with the RJD in Bihar, AIADMK in Tamil Nadu and IUML in Kerala. Talks are on to bring Ramadoss of the PMK in

Tamil Nadu and the BSP in Uttar Pradesh. While Mayawati has so far not agreed to have an alliance, Ramadoss has agreed to do so.

The Karnataka Janata Dal unit led by H.D. Deve Gowda and C.M. Ibrahim is keen to have an alliance with the Congress, while chief minister J.H. Patel is all set to join the Hegde camp. Deve Gowda is keen on having a national alliance of the Janata Dal with the Congress, asking for a few seats in UP, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan and six seats in Karnataka. Though nothing has been finalised as yet.

Leaders of both the national parties should choose the minimum number of allies ensuring that they will not desert them soon. Otherwise, at the end of the day, one should not cry that he or she was doing well, but was betrayed by someone. •

Invasion thro

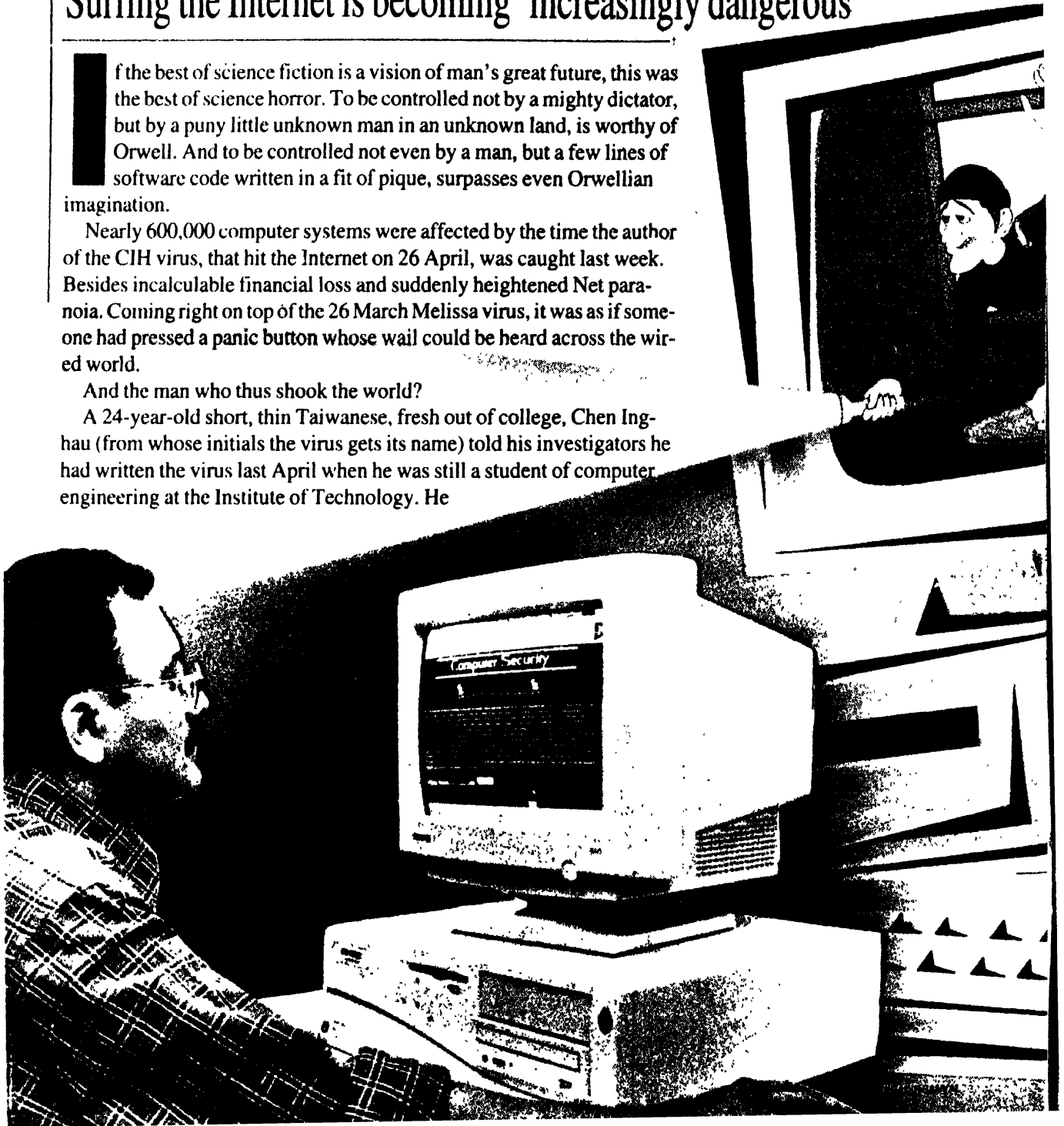
Surfing the Internet is becoming increasingly dangerous

If the best of science fiction is a vision of man's great future, this was the best of science horror. To be controlled not by a mighty dictator, but by a puny little unknown man in an unknown land, is worthy of Orwell. And to be controlled not even by a man, but a few lines of software code written in a fit of pique, surpasses even Orwellian imagination.

Nearly 600,000 computer systems were affected by the time the author of the CIH virus, that hit the Internet on 26 April, was caught last week. Besides incalculable financial loss and suddenly heightened Net paranoia. Coming right on top of the 26 March Melissa virus, it was as if someone had pressed a panic button whose wail could be heard across the wired world.

And the man who thus shook the world?

A 24-year-old short, thin Taiwanese, fresh out of college, Chen Ing-hau (from whose initials the virus gets its name) told his investigators he had written the virus last April when he was still a student of computer engineering at the Institute of Technology. He



ugh the Net

had been a virus victim in the past and CIH was meant to be his revenge against inefficient anti-virus programs.

What it turned out to be was a global nuisance that is now making the anti-virus software companies a lot of money.

Exactly a month before that, the Melissa virus hit the Net, clogging e-mail lines and forcing thousands of computer networks all over the world to shut down. It was probably the fastest travelling computer virus ever. It has not yet been established who the author of Melissa is, but as one investigator said: "We don't know who created Melissa. But my guess is an adolescent boy."

Things have changed drastically since Windows was conceived. Except for Third World countries, most of the rest of the world is now wired up. Security has become paramount — a fact of life that Microsoft is refusing to take into consideration

Scare stories are boring. But just to make a point — what if the two authors had not been disgruntled yet reasonably benign people? What if they really wanted it to hurt? What if they had gotten together to create a virus that spread as fast as Melissa and crippled computers as badly as CIH?

There are at least three phenomena at the moment which, if not checked, can lead to mayhem in the wired world.

The first relates to Microsoft, the software giant of the world. Viruses have always existed, even for MS-DOS (Microsoft Disk Operating System). But the Windows OS lends itself to misuse as no other system before it has — it has no security worth mentioning. The Windows OS was meant

Know Your Virus

Understanding the disease is halfway to combating it

NAME: CIH**ALIAS:** Chernobyl**ORIGIN:** Taiwan**INFECTS:** Windows '95 and '98.exe files

WHAT IT DOES: The virus activates destructively and overwrites most of the data on the computer's hard drive — what is called a computer meltdown.

It also has a unique activation routine which tries to overwrite the Flash BIOS chip of the machine. If this succeeds, the machine will be unable to boot at all unless the chip itself is reprogrammed.

BACKGROUND: Was first located in Taiwan in early June 1998. Since then, it has been among the ten most common viruses for several months. It has been particularly widespread because of its distribution through the pirated software channel, including some new games which are among the quickest vehicles for spreading viruses.

NAME: W97M/Melissa**ALIAS:** Simpsons**ORIGIN:** Internet discussion group alt.sex

INFECTS: Works with Microsoft Word '97, Microsoft Word 2000 and Microsoft Outlook e-mail client. It can infect both Windows and Macintosh users. If the infected machine does have not Outlook or Internet access at all, the virus will continue to spread locally within the user's own documents.

WHAT IT DOES: The writer of the virus either has a rare sense of humour or is a puritan activist.

Either way, the virus initially infected users who visited an Internet site called alt.sex and downloaded a file —

LIST.DOC — that contained passwords to top 50 pornographic sites on the Net.

When the infected user opened the file in Microsoft Word, the virus reached out and searched for his e-mail directory. It then mailed itself to the top 50 names on his list. Most people who receive such mail are likely to open the file as it comes from people they know. After that, the virus installs itself onto the receiver's system, searches for his e-mail directory and so on from there.

Moreover, after sending itself out, the virus continues to infect other Word documents on the user's computers. Eventually, these documents could also end up being mailed to everyone on your mailing list. This can be potentially disastrous as confidential data could be sent out without the user's knowledge.

HISTORY: Probably the shortest and most unusual of all virus histories. On 27 March, 1999, Data Fellows, one of the world's leading developers of anti-virus software sent out this message on the Net: "Warning computer users about a virulent and widespread computer virus found on 26 March. This virus has spread all over the globe within just hours of initial discovery, apparently spreading faster than any other virus before."

Within one day, it had clogged e-mail accounts all over the world and many multinational companies reported widespread infections, including Microsoft and Intel. Microsoft closed down their whole e-mail system to prevent a further spreading of the virus. By the time the weekend was out, it was difficult to estimate financial loss as numerous computer networks had to be shut down worldwide.

"We've never seen a virus spread so rapidly," Mikko Hypponen, Data Fellows' manager of anti-virus research commented on the Net. "We've seen a handful of viruses that distribute themselves automatically over e-mail, but not

for stand-alone PCs and security considerations — that become imperative if you connect to other computers or the Internet — were never a part of the basic OS.

Things have changed drastically since Windows was conceived. Now, except for Third World countries like India which still have islands of automation, most of the rest of the world is wired up. Both through internal and external networks. Security become paramount — a fact of life that Microsoft is refusing to take into consideration.

The second phenomenon relates to hackers. Also a breed that has always existed but is now growing with a vengeance.

The hackers had set out to preserve individual privacy. They couldn't have destroyed it more effectively. And that is what is ultimately at stake. We probably don't realise it, but right now everyone is spying on everyone else

one of them has been as successful as Melissa in the real world."

NAME:
WM/PolyPoster Virus

INFECTS: Microsoft Word

WHAT IT DOES:

This is another one to look out for. On 18 June, Data Fellows announced the discovery of yet another macro virus called Poly-Poster which uses advanced replication methods to spread within Microsoft Word documents.

According to DF, once a machine becomes infected the virus will spread within them to new machines.

However, the most disturbing part of the virus is in its activation routine. The virus activates at random and will try to send the user's Word documents to Usenet newsgroups. As an end result, the virus could post, for example, company confidential data or highly personal material in an open cyber-forum.

"The messages posted by the virus look like they are coming from the real user of the machine, complete with the user name and signature. The virus contains a list of newsgroups where it will attempt to post the messages. These include popular discussion groups which attract thousands of readers, including alt.hacker, alt.binaries.pictures.erotica, alt.fan.hanson, alt.windows95 and alt.skinheads," Data Fellows has said.

To top it all, the posted documents are always infected by the virus and users who view them in Word will thus get infected, allowing the virus to spread from their machines.

"This is something we've been expecting for quite some time," Mikko Hypponen said. "Viruses which simply delete data are easy to recover from—by using back-ups. However,



When the infected user opened the file in Microsoft Word, the virus reached out and searched for his e-mail directory. It then mailed itself to the top 50 names on his list

there is no way to recover from an incident where a virus posts confidential documents publicly to the Internet.

NAME: SK
ALIAS: Suk
ORIGIN: Russia

INFECTS: Windows '95

WHAT IT DOES: The most interesting thing in the virus is its ability to embed into Windows HELP files. The HLP files has long been known to be vulnerable for some virus infection, but Win95/SK is the first virus to actually do it. The macro is automatically executed by WinHelp when the help file is opened.

More dangerously, when the virus detects the user's attempts to run an anti-virus programme, it tries to delete all files from all drives in the system, including network drives.

As of now, it is believed to contain certain bugs that make its propagation slow. But in coming months, this could be a big one.

Last year, a group called the Cult of the Dead Cow (CDC) attended a computer security conference and told Microsoft officials in open forum that their operating system was riddled with security holes. With characteristic and well-known flair, Microsoft waved them away.

CDC then called a press conference in the United States and declared they were releasing a program on the Net called Back Orifice (a take-off on Microsoft's Back Office suite) that would pierce every security claim of the giant. Microsoft still didn't pay heed. Till Back Orifice happened.

It was a nightmare. A program—not a virus, mark you—

that could take complete control of any computer running the Windows 95 or 98 operating systems, no matter how far away they were. Microsoft then claimed that its Windows NT OS was secure and that users really concerned with security could shift to that. Till it came to light that many more such backdoors existed—Netbus for one. What's more, Netbus was even more comprehensive than Orifice—it even penetrated Windows NT. After that, Microsoft shied away from the security issue.

As for the hacker group the Cult of the Dead Cow, it claimed at the time that it was concerned with privacy of PC users

Backdoors To Your World

People are peeping into your PC and you may not even know it

These are not viruses. They are legitimate programs called 'Backdoors' that can be installed on remote computers through certain Internet sites or through e-mails sent to you. Master's Paradise, Deep Throat, Back Orifice and Netbus can and are used to spy on and steal data from computers. In management language, they are called Asset Management Tools. And you know what? They are now available commercially.

So here is a list of what a hacker sitting thousands of miles away can do to your computer:

- 1)** Open/start your CD-ROM tray once or as many times as he wants in specified intervals
- 2)** Interfere with your mouse and change the left button's functions to the right button and vice-versa
- 3)** Start any other application or window on your system; for instance, you may be wanting to work in Word but the computer will keep opening Excel
- 4)** Play music on your computer which you will be forced to listen to

5) Point your mouse to wherever he wants, irrespective of where you are trying to point it

6) Shut down Windows, reboot, log-off or power off your system while you are still working on it

7) Send keystrokes to the target computer. That is, you could type 't' on your computer but the hacker can force it to type 'x' or an 'o' or any other alphabet he wants

8) Listen for keystrokes on your system and save them to file: basically, he can read whatever you are typing

9) Get a screenshot from a remote computer. That is, sitting thousands of miles away he can see your computer screen

10) Record sounds that the microphone can catch; that is, the hacker can listen to everything that is happening in your room. You could be fighting with your wife, talking to your child or eating — as long as the computer is on, he can hear it all.

11) The hacker can copy or delete any

file from your system

12) The hacker can block certain keys on your keyboard thereby disallowing you to escape or quit from a programme

13) He can read all your passwords; and through your computer gain access to every network you can log on to. For instance, using your name and password, he can log on to the Net or even your company's system. Once there, he will be able to copy, delete, read anything he wants to (imagine the damage if you are an important official in a defence establishment).

You could even change your password as many times as you want, he will still be able to see the changed passwords.

Is that scary enough? If not, here's some more: your computer could be having Netbus or Back Orifice and you might not even know it. It is quite widespread in India. And if the Prime Minister's Office or the defence ministry are using Windows, they would do well to get a little paranoid.

biography in electronic records. Using just Sands' name and an address from the phone book, they found her tax information, names of her husband and ex-husband, names of her neighbours, property records, vehicles she owned, accident records, professional licences, civil suits and any judgements she might have faced.

And such information is now available commercially from a new professional called the information broker. He caters to an unquenchable thirst for information, specially from two big institutions — the corporate world and the government. Ever wonder how all that unsolicited junk mail lands up on your table? It means someone is making a dossier on you, your buying habits, your eating habits, your entertainment preferences — ultimately your life.

If all this seem a little far-fetched, it's because computer users tend to forget one fundamental fact: when you connect to the Net, the Net also connects to you. It's a two-way street.

If you can download data from the Net, the Net can also steal a data from your computer. Or, as in the case of viruses, send software codes to your computer, unknown to you.

And this is not a First World problem. India is very much open to the menace — remember the six teenagers who broke into BARC (Bhabha Atomic Research Centre)? The oldest among them was 18. What if it was a...? The possibilities are quite terrifying.

There is a new movement happening — that of withdrawal. More and more companies are disconnecting from the Internet and e-commerce is not likely to explode the way it was supposed to. There is a popular saying on the Net these days: "The only way to make your site 100 per cent secure is to take it off the Internet."

It's now beginning to sound like a prophecy. •

Sarita Rani/Hyderabad



Mulayam Singh Yadav with Sonia Gandhi: polls apart

Doab decides

*Weighing the poll prospects in the political heartland of
Uttar Pradesh and Bihar*

Folklore has it that the British called it the 'cow belt' because the cow was most revered in this region. The people here were also said to be as meek as cows. In poetry and literature, it was called Doab, the region between the Ganga and the Yamuna. Post-Independence social scientists found it convenient to refer to it as the 'Hindi heartland'. But call it by any name, Uttar

Pradesh and Bihar has been the region where the political action has been. And things don't seem to be different in the millennium's last election.

Things have changed. People are no longer meek (if at all they'd ever been). They are articulate and after the Mandal movement, the most aggressive, politically.

With good reason. UP, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana

and Delhi account for 221 Lok Sabha seats. Just UP and Bihar send 139 people to the Lok Sabha. In an era when 200 seats will decide whether you're going to be invited to form the government, these two become crucial states.

SUNDAY investigates the systems of electoral alliance, power and castes in these two states to pick out a few constituencies which will indicate how the states will vote. The hard work of 139 per-

sons will decide who the Prime Minister of India will be.

Uttar Pradesh

Basic facts

The 1998 election

☛ The BJP won 52 seats out of 85, polling 36.29 per cent of the vote

☛ The Congress won five seats, polling 5.75 per cent

☛ The Bahujan Samaj Party and the Samajwadi Party, now ostensibly sworn enemies of the BJP, fought separately. But together they polled 50 per cent of the vote, winning six and 20 seats respectively

☛ The argument was that the BJP won seats only because of a split in the anti-BJP vote

The 1999 election

☛ The BSP and the Congress could contest the election together or in a seat adjustment. Therefore, barring unforeseen circumstances like sabotage, the chances of Dalit and Muslim votes being divided are less

☛ If Dalits and Muslims vote in a consolidated pattern, the BJP will have trouble in areas like eastern UP where there is a huge Dalit-Muslim electorate

☛ There is an erosion of faith among the Muslims on the Samajwadi Party. Their votes should go to the Congress

☛ The Samajwadi Party still has Yadav votes at its command. To keep Sonia Gandhi and the Congress out, it could even ally with the BJP, heralding the return of anti-Congressism and opposition to dynastic rule

Here are some significant seats and their impact on the region.

Uttarakhand

Given the fact that it was the BJP which proposed statehood for this region, which had till then only heard promises of autonomy, seen little concrete action, the BJP should have an edge over the

Congress in the hills of UP.

The decisive and crucial — and most prestigious — seat in Uttarakhand is Nainital. In a way, this seat tells voters what the trend in the other constituencies in the hills is going to be.

Nainital saw a clash of the titans in the last general elections: N.D. Tiwari contested the seat against Ila Pant, the daughter-in-law of former Union minister G.B. Pant and wife of K.C. Pant, a new entrant in the BJP.

Things were different in the last election. Tiwari was regarded for his loyalty to the Nehru-Gandhi family and wound up his Congress (Tiwari) to rejoin the Congress. But his sacrifices went unrecognised among his electorate. Despite the homecoming he lost by more than 16,000 votes.

This defeat had reverberations all over Uttarakhand: the BJP swept the hill region.

This time, things may be a little more difficult for the party. Although it declared statehood, it had to compromise on Hardwar and Udham Singh Nagar, having promised to exclude these from the proposed Uttaranchal state.

Ila Pant is well known in the constituency and her family is influential in the region. Yet, the going may be tough this time.

If the BJP doesn't get the Uttarakhand seats — and they go to the Congress — it could be difficult for it to retain the position it managed to get in the last election. This could dash its hopes of forming the next government at the Centre.

Eastern UP

Two crucial seats which will decide the



Ila Pant: the going may be tough this time



Kalyan Singh: attracting the middle castes

mood of eastern UP are Deoria and Azamgarh. Both are representative — in terms of voter profiles — of other seats in eastern UP. Typically, a constituency in the region will have between 25 and 30 per cent Dalit-Muslim vote.

In Deoria, the BJP candidate in the last election, Gen. (retd) Tripathi, lost by 4,000 votes. Although the party worked hard for Tripathi, he lost because he shot himself in the foot: he treated his campaign as a war game rather than a political battle.

For instance, he would refuse to stop his cavalcade to address roadside meetings on the grounds that he would be late for his next meeting. And having arrived at the next meeting on the dot, he would find that there just weren't enough people to listen to him.

The result was that the Samajwadi Party candidate, Mohan Singh, won. Workers say it was a BJP borough seat — which they lost because of the candidate.

This time, after all the representations it has got (anybody but the general, say the workers), the BJP will probably field a Bhumihiar candidate.

Two factors will ensure a BJP victory in much of eastern UP and specifically Deoria: one, the way the government was toppled has consolidated the forward castes behind the BJP; two, the



Congress's opposition to the dismissal of the Rabri Devi government in Bihar has cost it dear.

Eastern UP has always been affected by events in Bihar. Marriages and functions are often held across the border. There is also dismay at the deteriorating law and order in Bihar and the Congress's complicity with the RJD government.

So the BJP believes it will get Deoria this time and will influence eastern UP to vote for it.

However, the seat which will be decisive — and BJP leaders admit, tough — will be Azamgarh. At the moment this is represented by Akbar Ahmad 'Dumpy' of the BSP. With a 34 per cent Dalit-Muslim vote, this has been a stronghold of the BSP rather than that of the BJP. Yet, in the last election, Dumpy won by a relatively slender margin of 5,000 votes.

The only explanation for this is that the Dalit-Muslim vote got divided among the Congress, the SP and the BSP. The BJP hopes this will happen again, and its traditional voters, the Bhumihars and Yadavs, will come back to it. Azamgarh has been represented by the socialists (Vishram Rai, one of UP's best known socialists, won few elections but was a towering presence in Azamgarh). Bhumihars have been in the

forefront of the anti-Congress movement. And in caste terms, Azamgarh is an anomaly because the Bhumihars and Yadavs have a social alliance.

The BJP is hoping to set up a Yadav candidate in Azamgarh. If it does that, it has a chance of beating back the 34 per cent consolidation of Muslims and Dalits behind the BSP. But if the Congress and the BSP don't have a pact, this alliance is not going to work.

Much of this logic is applicable to many other seats in eastern UP. Gonda and Ghazipur are also potentially win-

**If the BJP doesn't
change its chief minister
in UP, it stands to gain
rather than lose.
Because of Kalyan
Singh, a whole lot of
middle castes have come
into the BJP camp**

ing seats for the BJP, which currently it doesn't hold.

Western UP

Western UP is fundamentally different from eastern UP. It turned anti-Congress when Charan Singh was betrayed by Indira Gandhi after 1979 and the Dalits, Muslims and middle castes (Saini, Gujjar, Jat, Tyagi, etc.) voted against the Congress in three successive elections: 1989, 1991 and 1996.

However, since the Nineties the BJP grew enormously in western UP, with the region contributing more than its share of *kar sevaks* in the Ayodhya agitation.

Two seats indicated how pervasive the BJP's influence was. Saharanpur voted for Naqli Singh, who began BJP politics almost from scratch and polled 38.5 per cent of the votes in the 1991 Lok Sabha election. Rashid Masood of the Janata Dal won the constituency, though by small margins until he fell to the BJP in 1996.

As the BJP grew, so did the BSP. Initially this helped the BJP because the votes opposed to it got divided. But this time, with the resurgence of Muslims and their eyes on the Congress for deliverance, the BJP can be beaten back if the BSP and the Congress enter into an alliance.

The BJP's strategy has been to consolidate caste Hindus, especially from the middle castes. This time, if it puts up a Saini candidate, it will be hard for the BSP or the Congress to defeat him. The Samajwadi Party has been a bit player in western UP. It could disappear from the region altogether this time. Muzaffarnagar is another seat that went the BJP way following the saffronisation of western UP in the Nineties. In 1991, a virtually unknown BJP candidate polled more than 51 per cent of the vote.

After such a high vote, the only way the BJP could go was down. But it managed to retain the seat because of the split in the anti-BJP vote in 1996 and 1998.

The split was part of a well-thought-out strategy on the part of the BSP: it figured that so long as it managed to keep the 20 per cent of its base intact and keep the SP out of Saharanpur, its purpose was served.

This time, unless the Congress and the BSP do a deal it seems that the BJP will once again win the seat with its steady share of 36 per cent.

The figures tell us how important it is for the Congress and the BSP to have an alliance in UP—and not just seat adjustment, an honest political alliance where votes of both parties get transferred to the common candidates. Without that, in western UP, the BJP will continue to be where it is: at the top.

Central UP

The most significant constituencies in this region are Etawah and Hardoi. While the former has been the pocket borough of Mulayam Singh Yadav, the latter is a reserved constituency which went to the Samajwadi Party in the last election.

Etawah is no longer comfortable for Mulayam because the BSP has a 20 per cent base here. This is largely because of Yadav's own machinations: in 1991 he encouraged Kanshi Ram of the BSP to contest a by-election and sabotaged the election of his own party candidate to ensure that Ram won.

The Congress, as in a lot of central UP constituencies in the Nineties, has hardly any presence here. Its candidate Sukhda Mishra lost in the last election because of a split in the anti-BJP vote.

This seat can no longer be considered safe by anyone. In central UP where Mulayam has a presence, a lot depends on his postures, stated and unstated. If there is a silent understanding with the BJP that Sonia Gandhi has to be kept out of UP, this area could throw up some surprises.

Hardoi, another reserved seat, went to Usha Verma of the SP in the last election. It had a Scheduled Caste strength

Akbar Ahmad: banking on the Dalit-Muslim vote



Ram Vilas Paswan (centre) with L.K. Advani: will the BJP embrace him?

of 31.8 per cent. Along with the ten per cent Muslim vote, the only way the BJP could have made a dent here was by attempting a forward caste consolidation.

This worked in 1991 and 1996. However, this time the whole equation could change if there is some adjustment between the BJP and the SP.

Bihar

Basic facts

The 1998 election

☛ Though the Congress's share of the votes went down to 7.13 per cent from 11.26 per cent in 1996, its seats increased from two to five

☛ The BJP's vote went up to 23.5 per cent from three per cent in 1996

The 1999 election

☛ The contest this time is going to be bipolar: the Samata Party and the BJP will fight the Congress and the RJD

☛ All other parties — the CPI which was once so powerful in Bihar, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha and the Janata Dal — are showing a declining vote percentage and are likely to evaporate unless they take some dramatic measures



Kanshi Ram: no longer safe



North Bihar

Out of the 26 seats in north Bihar, the most important one is Muzaffarpur. This is such a Laloo Prasad Yadav stronghold that George Fernandes had to shift from this seat in 1996 to Nalanda, vacating it for Jai Narayan Prasad Nishad who belongs to Laloo's party, the Rashtriya Janata Dal.

Nishad is widely perceived to be opposed to Laloo. There is a slim chance that he might cross the floor, join the Samata Party and contest the election as a Samata-BJP candidate.

Why is this so important? Because the two dominant castes in the constituency are Nishad (fishermen) and Bhumihaar (landowners). In the last election, the BJP candidate, Harinder Kumar, lost by about 22,000 votes.

Given this scenario, if Nishad does indeed join the Samata Party and contest as its candidate, not only will the BJP's votes get transferred to him, but also the impact of his candidature will affect the



nearby constituencies.

Another important constituency is Patna. So contentious was the last election that not only did the BJP win the seat by the narrowest of narrow margins (under 1,000 votes), but also more than 20 CRPF companies had to be posted to ensure that the election took place smoothly.

The seat was won last time by C.P. Thakur. He defeated Laloo's right-hand man, Ram Kripal Yadav, who later became a member of the state Legislative Council.

Patna is dominated by the two most powerful castes in Bihar: the Yadavs and the Bhumihars. There is no dearth of money, manpower, guns or resources in this constituency. The Kayasths, another forward caste, and the Koeris, the OBC whose best known representative is railway minister Nitish Kumar, are also represented in Patna.

It is an interesting constituency because it was once considered a pocket borough of the CPI. Bihar CPI leader

Ram Avtar Shastri had won thrice from Patna. However, after his death, the CPI's base went across to the RJD. Although the CPI would still like to field its own candidate — Ram Nath Yadav, the sitting MLA from the Vikram Assembly constituency — the Bhumi-

The BJP's tally could go down in UP and increase marginally in Bihar. A lot depends on how candidates are fielded. In many constituencies in UP minor changes could do the trick

har, Kayasth and Koeri votes will be cast in favour of the BJP. The RJD might float a red herring by putting a Kayasth candidate who will cash more than 1,50,000 votes. However, at this moment this is a remote possibility.

One reason why the BJP is cheerful about winning this constituency is that out of five Assembly segments, three are with the BJP. If Nishad doesn't cross over, Patna could be retained by the BJP.

South Bihar

The three representative seats in south Bihar are already with the BJP. Khunti, held by tribal leader Karia Munda, was won by the BJP in the last two elections and old-timers rule out the possibility of any change in this 67 per cent tribal constituency.

What is however significant is the presence of the Congress in this seat. In 1996 and 1998, the Congress candidate, Sushila Kerketta, polled so many votes

that she managed to edge the JMM to third place.

Under the circumstances, a lot depends on how much coordination there is between the Congress and the RJD, how much the JMM's base is eroded and how much of it shifts to the Congress.

In the past, the split in the Congress and JMM's votes have led to the BJP's victory. But a reinforced, reinvigorated Congress? The game is still open.

This logic applies to other seats in south Bihar as well. Take Dumka. It is symbolic of the political clout the BJP has in south Bihar. The reserved Scheduled Tribe constituency was held by the JMM's Shibu Soren for two terms: 1991 and 1996. On both occasions, the BJP candidate, Babulal Marandi, found himself humbled here.

However, the JMM bribery scandal took its toll on Soren and because he got tied up in a myriad of legal cases, Marandi emerged as the giant-killer in the 12th Lok Sabha. Marandi was promptly adopted as the party's tribal mascot and rewarded with a ministership.

There is little doubt that the JMM is in the doldrums and its future is in jeopardy all over south Bihar. But the question is, what will happen to its base? Apart from the BJP no other party has taken such a strong position on the demand for a separate Jharkhand state. The RJD-Congress alliance is likely to field a tribal candidate and pray that their combined base returns to them. However, the BJP will, as strongly, try to counter charges that it is a Hindu revivalist party.

In Dhanbad the dynamics of the contest is slightly different, it is a case of the CPI having lost its way. In what was an urbanised, working-class trade union constituency, the CPI split into two. Later because of the rise of A.K. Roy, the independent Leftist trade union leader, Dhanbad stayed independent.

However, its independence was soon lost. The left parties and A.K. Roy were shocked when Dhanbad swung towards the BJP and backed the Ayodhya campaign enthusiastically. In 1991, the constituency moved from the Left to the Right, conclusively.

The BJP candidate, Rita Verma, has won three elections. So there seems to be little chance of the party changing its candidate. What is most shocking is the JMM's decline in this area. At one time it could even play a decisive role.

However, all that has changed. JMM



Anand Mohan Singh: Rajput clout

counts for little now. The battle is between the BJP and the Marxist Coordination Committee.

Eastern Bihar

An interesting constituency is Kishanganj. This is on the West Bengal-

Bihar border and more than 65 per cent of the electorate are Muslims. In the last election, Kishanganj saw a tight three-cornered contest among the BJP, the RJD and the Samajwadi Party. Although Taslimuddin, one of Laloo's blue-eyed boys, won by a narrow margin, BJP candidate Shahnawaz Khan ended up third.

In the two earlier elections, the BJP had tried to consolidate the Hindu vote by putting up a Hindu candidate. But that was never enough to counter the solid Muslim vote. For the first time in the last election, it tried setting up a Muslim candidate. Because it was so sure it wasn't winning the seat, it didn't send any senior leader to campaign. The central leadership 'forgot' about Kishanganj.

In its assessment, the BJP has the support of the Hindus, whether it fields a Hindu or a non-Hindu. So, the attempt would be to split the Muslim vote into as many directions as possible. And Kishanganj could go saffron this time.

This is however, a typical case. Kishanganj is an aberration rather than the rule. By and large, the Muslim and Yadav votes would still go to Laloo, although the forward-caste votes could consolidate behind the BJP.



Rita Verma: will the good run continue?



Kishanganj saw a tight three-cornered contest last time among the BJP, the RJD and the Samajwadi Party. Taslimuddin, one of Laloo's blue-eyed boys, won by a narrow margin

Conclusions

- The BJP's tally could go down in UP and increase marginally in Bihar. A lot depends on how candidates are fielded. In many constituencies in UP — Gonda, Balrampur, Mohanalganj, Bahraich, Kaiserganj and Ghazipur for instance — minor changes such as changing the sitting MP could do the trick. However, BJP sources also say that at least three seats — Bansgaon, Khalilabad and Domariaganj — are already lost. The MPs have visited the constituencies barely three times since they were elected.

Equally, the Amethi-Rae Bareilly-Sultanpur triangle could go out of the BJP's hands if Sonia Gandhi chooses to contest from Amethi. So, the Congress's tally could go up to 15 in UP.

- If the BJP doesn't change its chief minister in UP, it stands to gain rather than lose. Because of Kalyan Singh, a whole lot of middle castes — Kushwaha, Chaurasiya, Badhai, Luhar, Teli, Kumher, Saini, Lodhi, etc. — have come into the BJP fold. If the party can keep the *savarna* — the forward castes — intact, it can retain its present tally of seats without any problem. However, the leadership in UP should be intact.

- In Bihar two or three individuals

could make an important difference to the BJP's prospects. One is Anand Mohan Singh. However immoral his politics and no matter how many criminal cases are there against him, there is little doubt that Singh is considered their leader by the Rajputs.

One leader has guided the destiny of



Jai Narayan Prasad Nishad: will he cross over?

the Rajputs in the state. During the freedom struggle and soon after Independence it was Anugraha Narayan Sinha, a mantle he passed on to his son Satyendra Narayan Sinha. That clout has been passed on to Anand Mohan Singh now.

- Janata Dal leader Ram Vilas Paswan has held his own despite a non-existent party in the state. Paswan has considerable following among the Dalits and from being dependent on Laloo Prasad Yadav, is now actively opposed to him.

The BJP would like to embrace him within its fold. There was a chance that Paswan might have been co-opted into the Samata Party, but now that is a non-starter. However, at the meeting of the BJP national executive, party vice-president Kailashpati Mishra is said to have observed that it would be in the BJP's interest to have an alliance with Paswan.

- Though it is the BJP's view that the Samata-BJP alliance would be able to get 38 seats, less ambitious members of the national executive said the more reasonable figure would be 32. The alliance currently has 30 seats. •

Niranjan Mukhopadhyay and Rajni Srinivasan/Lucknow with Naved Zahir/Patna

Too much of a good thing

Chief minister Chandrababu Naidu will have to sit in the Opposition after the Assembly elections. And the loser will be Andhra Pradesh

Ask any member of Parliament and he'll tell you what a bunch of ingrates the Indian electorate is. No matter how many power plants you put up for them, how many industries and roads you build and how many job opportunities you create, come elections and all this becomes irrelevant. In fact, winning elections in India has nothing to do with what you do for your constituency. It has to do with emotion, anger, sympathy and massaging the ego of the voters.

Take an instance: Amethi. In the last election, despite all the petrol pumps that former minister Satish Sharma set up for the people of the constituency, all the charitable hospitals, roads and factories, the people of the constituency elected Sanjay Singh to the Lok Sabha.

In just one day, years of hard work of the Nehru-Gandhi family were wiped out. The blistering afternoons Sonia Gandhi spent campaigning for the Congress when her husband held the seat, the representations thrust at Rajiv and Sonia and the painstaking follow-ups... dissolved into nothing. Amethi smiled delightedly at the promise that it would be turned into a 'mini-Singapore' — and voted for the BJP.

Now take Andhra Pradesh. From all accounts, it has a model chief minister. Chandrababu Naidu is highly regarded by colleagues and adversaries alike as a good administrator. After years of individual caprice — first of former chief minister N.T. Rama Rao, then

Congress chief minister M. Channa Reddy — Naidu's approach to Andhra Pradesh had come as a breath of fresh air to those who understand the state's special problems.

What Naidu has done for the state is quite straightforward. He has given a scientific basis to administration, restored officers' self-confidence and created conditions for foreign investment by emphasising on information technology as the modern mantra. He has reorganised infrastructure including power distribution — and has tried to prevent theft of electricity.

It is nobody's case that the poor in Andhra Pradesh have become more prosperous or that it has suddenly become the land of plenty. But Naidu has encouraged growth. This is more than many of his predecessors have managed to do.

In doing so, Naidu has also emerged as a politician with maturity and enormous patience. He was the only one everyone in the United Front would trust. He did not compromise on the essential anti-Congressism of the Telugu Desam Party and yet accepted the Congress's help when it decided to support a UF-TDP government from outside.

When the Bharatiya Janata Party wanted his help, he told it bluntly that he could never be part of a government which consisted of people who had brought down the Babri Masjid. But because the common manifesto of the BJP and allies didn't list land grab as one of its objectives, he would provide

constructive support.

Naidu was principled in his support to the BJP. When Speaker G.M.C. Balayogi, a TDP member, left it to the 'good sense' of Orissa chief minister Giridhar Gamang to decide whether he should vote or not and the BJP-led government fell for want of one vote, Naidu rang up Balayogi that night and lambasted him for his wishy-washy ruling. It was a matter of principle: Balayogi had let down the very set of people who'd ensured that he got the speakership.

With 12 TDP MPs in the Lok Sabha, Naidu could have played the same game as the Bahujan Samaj Party or Jayalalitha: blackmail the BJP to extract more and more from the Centre. But he supported the BJP on his own terms and never asked for anything.

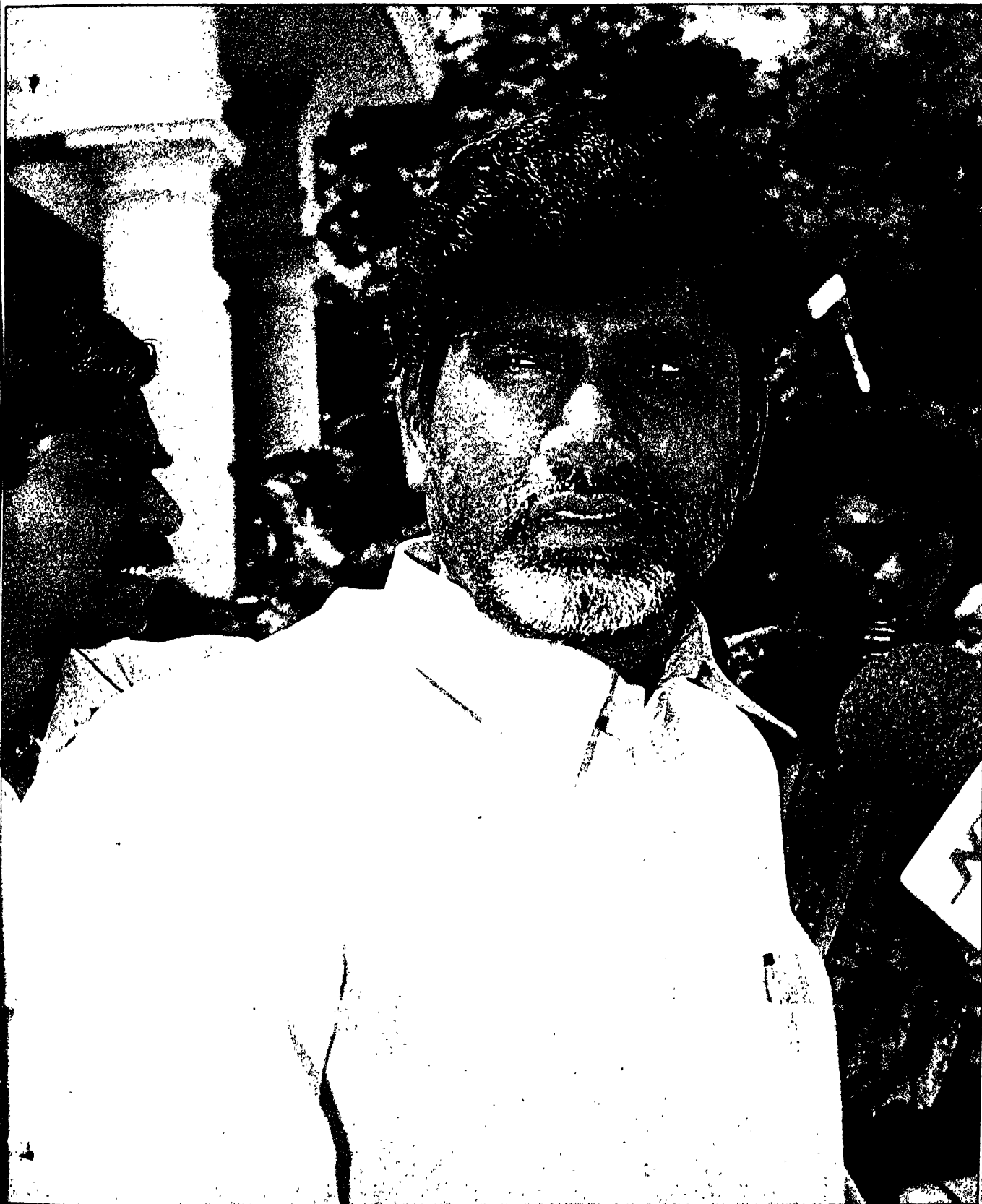
What is the net result of all this? Only that the TDP is going to lose the Assembly elections later this year. And that its showing in the Lok Sabha elections is going to be pitiful.

The Congress is baying for the TDP's blood. For five years the party has been out of power. This has caused all former schisms to be forgotten and all bickering to be put aside. TDP MLAs failed to translate Naidu's charisma as a force multiplier for themselves. So Naidu is now grappling with the fact that however good a leader he may be, finally he is only as good as his MLAs collectively.

Come November, there will be a slow winding down in Andhra Pradesh. Never mind the studios, information highways, laboratories, computer grids that came to AP during Naidu's tenure. Questions that will occupy the state will be whether to restore prohibition, how to manipulate electricity and power rates, play around with subsidies and use excise and tax as political weapons.

Then the power games will start: who is closer to New Delhi, how to topple the chief minister and install another. And then the merry-go-round: the legislature party will bring down a chief minister and will be told whom to vote in as the successor.

And the people of Andhra Pradesh will have thrown Chandrababu Naidu out — not because he did too little good, but because he did too much. That is the irony of Indian politics. •



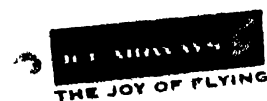
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'THE EXILE IS OVER'

V.P. Singh on the political situation and his role in it

INTERVIEWED BY SHRABANI BASU/LONDON

He'd gone for a walk in St James Park, a stone's throw from Buckingham Palace with his sketch pad and pencils. He'd sat down on a bench to sketch the ducks. But he wasn't quite successful. There was one sleepy duck lazing in the late April spring sunshine, but it got up and walked away. Then came a family of ducks, complete with young ducklings. They quacked for a while, then went away. A group of young boys gathered around asking him if he was an artist. An Indian recognised him and came up and greeted him. Soon a bigger crowd gathered. Vishwanath Pratap Singh, former Prime Minister of India, had to abandon sketching the ducks and go back to his hotel room instead.

"It was a lovely day. Those ducks reminded me of Indian politicians — always changing sides," said Singh. "I had so much fun with those ducks today. How can you get that in public life?"

But over the past few weeks, the phone has been ringing constantly in his suite at St James Court, where he is stay-



PRADIP SANYAL

ing during his treatment. As his Delhi hospital rearranges its dialysis units, Singh is camped in London, going for dialysis three times a week.

In between the hospital trips he has been in touch with Delhi at all times. It was his call to Saifuddin Soz of the National Conference that made Soz vote against the Vajpayee government, violating his party line. And the government fell by a margin of one vote.

Looking fit in his galabandh suit and characteristic cap, the former Prime Minister laughed at the suggestion that he was masterminding strategy from a hotel in London. But surprisingly he revealed to SUNDAY that he did not rule out his return to active politics by the end of the year. Excerpts from the interview.

SUNDAY: Are you pleased to hear that elections have been called?

V.P. Singh: I am not happy or sad. This was inevitable. I had said last year itself that this is the semi-final not the final and that the government would not last. I had said even the alternative government would not last. Both my stipulations have come true. There was no choice but to hold elections.

Q: But would you not have been in favour of a third

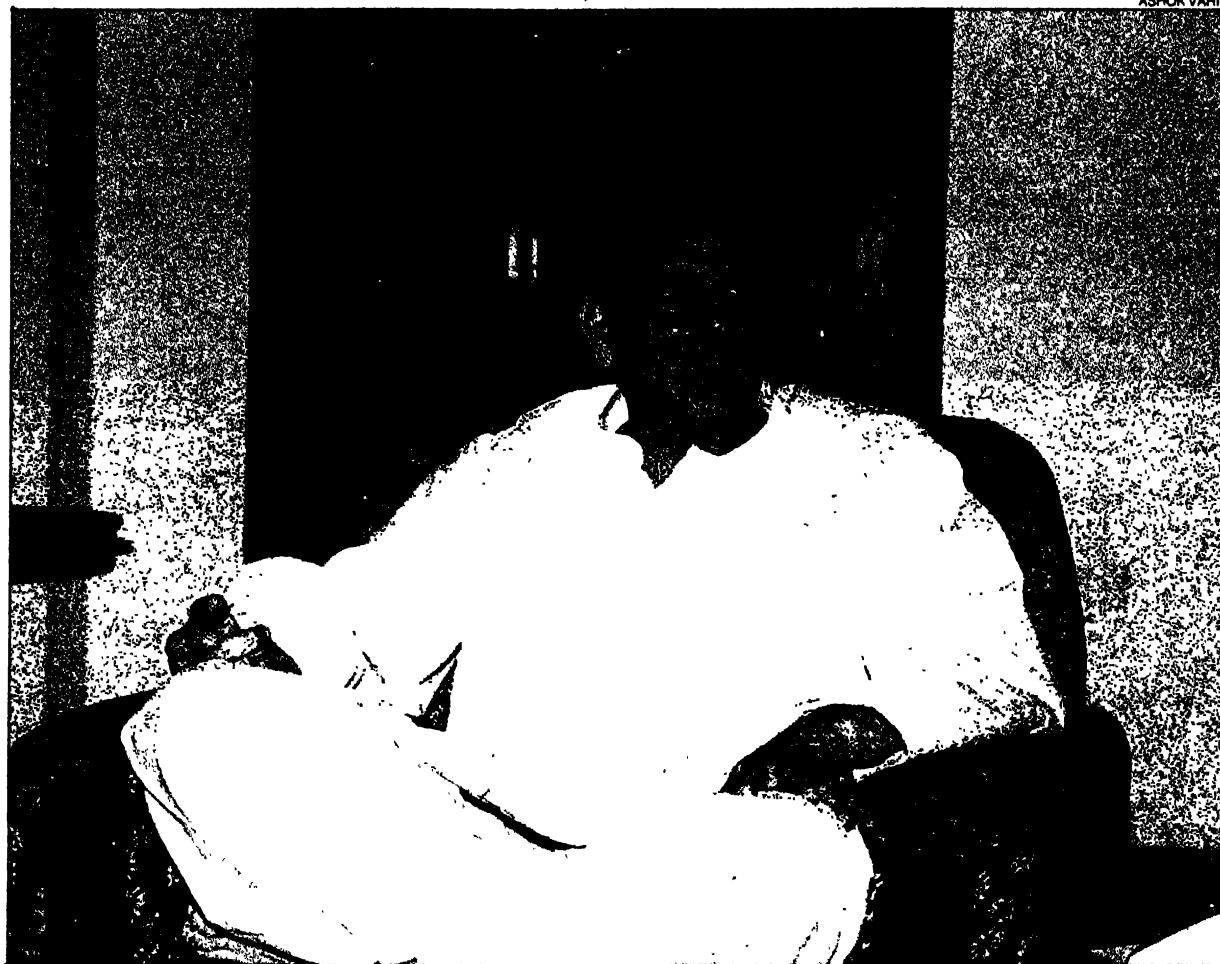
"Jyoti Basu has always been my first choice. I had asked him myself. But his health and party decision were important. Pressing him more is unfair to Basu himself"

front government? There were several reports that you were urging Jyoti Basu to take over as Prime Minister.

A: Jyoti Basu has always been my first choice. I had asked him myself. But his health and party decision were important. So when he is not available as Prime Minister, pressing him more is unfair to Jyoti Basu himself. Besides all that is history, the Congress was not in favour of it. In politics there is no point in dealing with the past, that is history. We have to look at the future.

Q: What do you see as the future?

A: There will be three forces in India now — the BJP, the Congress and the third front. I would have wanted the third force to occupy government and the Congress to occupy the Opposition. The third force has deep political roots. There are a large number of people who don't want the



BJP or the Congress. But they are not a cohesive force.

The Left will always play an important role. So I would want a strong third force and a strong Congress. But I know the BJP will be there. So, there will be three broad axes — the BJP axis, the Congress axis and the third front axis.

In a political scenario, there must always be a ruling space and an opposition space. I would have wanted both spaces to have remained secular and not wanted any space to go to any force which is causing division. This is where the third force comes in.

Q: Saifuddin Soz said you had asked him to vote for secularism and therefore vote against the government. It was a crucial vote that toppled the government.

A: (Laughs) Saifuddin Soz has already said what he has to say. He was not convinced by his party stand and I advised him what to do.

I feel very strongly about one thing. No party should have a hate agenda. The BJP has one defect. I say this though I have very good relations with their leaders. The BJP along with its various associates — Bajrang Dal, VHP and RSS — have a palpable hate agenda.

It may not be in their constitution, it is not mouthed by their top leaders, but it is there. And this is not conducive to the larger interests of the country. Any party with hate agen-

"I had stayed away for a whole year. After my treatment, I will be a free man. I will keep my options open. And I don't think I've lost a lot in five years"

da, even if it is a caste-based agenda, is not conducive. This has been my position. Other parties do not have a hate agenda.

Q: What about the role of the smaller parties, who have played power-brokers in this game? Where will they end up after the elections?

A: They will be eliminated in the next elections. Everything will be streamlined. It is a historical process. People will make broad choices. At the regional level they will carry on — TDP, AIADMK, DMK, Akali Dal — but they will all get into settled formations.

And as in Kerala, settled formations will emerge. There will be a long-term realignment of the third force. The pattern will be that they will be led by larger parties and will

be more stable with a third force as a strong force as well.

Q: Are you cynical about the role of regional parties, all settling their narrow agenda on the national scene?

A: The regional parties have come up by the people. And so far as they are elected they have a legitimacy. It is the larger parties that have brought down governments. Why latch on to regional parties? The Congress has brought down two governments. India is a large and diverse country. You cannot have a homogeneous system. There will always be regional parties.

Q: And what about the role of the Left?

A: The Left was careful not to join the government. It has a definite political agenda, installation of the Congress. At the party level they will fight both Congress and the BJP. Jyoti Basu has never confused the issue.



"The BJP has one defect. I say this though I have very good relations with their leaders. The BJP along with its various associates, Bajrang Dal, VHP and RSS, have a palpable hate agenda"

Q: And isn't it ironic that you yourself having been Rajiv Gandhi's biggest rival, now back a Congress-led government with Sonia Gandhi in power?

A: Yes, it is a historical fact. I fought the Congress, I went through St Kitts and Thakkar Committee and all that. But at this moment the issue is not V.P. Singh. The issue is the country. If I have to decide for the country, then personal issues are out.

The position that the Left had taken was the correct position. The Left has also been fighting the Congress, but the political perception is that there should be a change. National issues put personal considerations in the background. Personal animosities have nothing to do with governance. The big parties in the future will be the Congress and the

BJP but the Left will always be there and the regional parties. We must not lose the larger perception of the country.

Q: Do you see coalition politics continuing for a while?

A: Coalition will always be there. But it will be a maturer coalition from now on. Coalition partners will learn that it doesn't pay to cause instability. There have been coalitions in West Bengal and Kerala. But they have been stable coalitions.

As the National Front, we fought the struggle together. We did not go for post-election alliances like these governments have done. Also, the National Front came down on an issue, not because of internal squabbles.

Q: What chances do you give the Congress?

A: For the past year the Congress was doing well. They had not committed any faux pas. The BJP because of the projection of its differences and because of various other facts like price rise, etc. had been going down. But with this episode and a majority of one and the fact that an alternative government could be formed, does give a setback to the non-BJP formation. The argument is that there are conflicts within the Opposition, the very charge the Congress had against the BJP.

But how long this disadvantage will last is questionable. Politics is a constantly changing scene. It is not like drawing a landscape, where there is a hill and it remains there. It's a cloudscape. After five minutes, it has changed, it has vanished and a new formation has emerged.

I personally feel the Congress would have had an advantage if they had gone to elections after the Assembly polls in November in Karnataka and Andhra. They could have won the Assemblies and staked their legitimate bid for government. The BJP graph was coming down and the Congress was on the ascendant. But it has happened earlier than expected. So, the Congress will have a slight disadvantage.

At the moment it looks impossible to hold early elections because of logistic reasons like monsoons. Then we are looking at September which is five months away. For the BJP it will be important to see how it conducts itself in this period. For Congress, too, the timing is crucial.

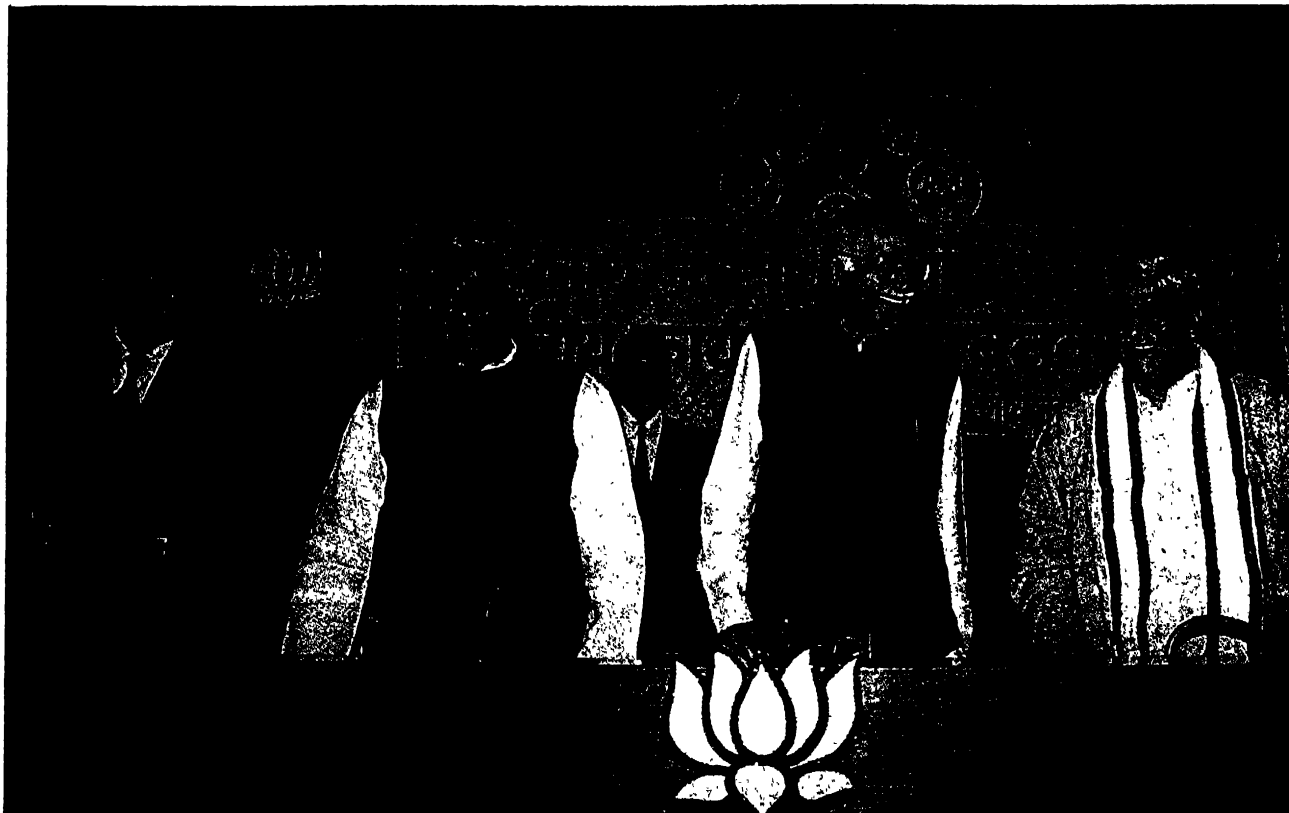
Q: And what about yourself? Do you see yourself returning to active politics? You are already involved. Would you take it farther?

A: I had said I would not participate in elections in 1998. I had stayed away for a whole year. Now the exile period is over. After my treatment, I will be a free man. I will keep my options open. And I don't think I've lost a lot in five years.

The major consideration is my health. I have to have dialysis three times a week. In politics, you need to be hundred per cent fit, you need to go and talk to people, you have to give your full commitment. My problem is my health, it is keeping me back. But in the future, my options are open.

Q: And what about leisure, do you still continue to paint and photograph?

A: Yes, my painting I continue, but photography is no longer possible for my health reasons. Still it is not as much as I would like to. I have sacrificed my creativity for politics. •



BJP TOP BRASS: (From left) Sikandar Bakht, Atal Behari Vajpayee, L.K. Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi

Preparing For The Polls

Politics is all about numbers. At least in the era of coalition politics. The truth could not have been more bitter for the BJP than in the recent past. After all, it was the solitary figure that wrecked the party's 13-month coalition in Lok Sabha. It thus comes as no surprise that backroom boys of the party are once again back at their favourite game in the party headquarters.

After all, the elections this time will determine whether the BJP is accepted as the "natural party of governance" or is made to sit out another term in the Opposition benches in Parliament. And that crucial difference on whether the BJP camp sits on the right side of the Speaker of the 13th Lok Sabha or on his left will be made by the numbers that matter most: the result of the forthcoming mid-term polls.

Elections are quite like the game of

The BJP leadership has to examine the ground realities before kicking off the election campaign

Russian Roulette with the fatal bullet coming when least expected. If that was not the case, then the BJP should have comfortably romped home last time, had not the unforeseen setbacks in Maharashtra and Rajasthan stopped the BJP well below the 200 mark.

Similar was the case in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh where good performances of the Rashtriya Janata Dal and the Samajwadi Party were responsible for the Vajpayee government's failure to secure an absolute majority, without banking on unstable political allies. For the BJP, it is

thus crucial to not only retain the seats that it won last year, but also make dents in areas where it lost out narrowly.

Though it is too early to gauge whether the current feeling of sympathy of the Vajpayee government would translate into an electoral wave or not, analysts within the BJP camp are hopeful of improving upon the existing 182 strength in Lok Sabha even in the absence of a wave factor. Election results in India are often determined by local issues and the past record of candidates. Because of this factor, the party is expected to give greater thought to candidate selection than in the past.

Sources within the BJP cite the result of the 1998 poll to buttress their claims that the party should be comfortably within handshaking distance of a majority along with reliable allies. Says a senior BJP leader, "This time the added advantage is that our alliance has already been proved to be a united one

whereas the Opposition is a badly divided house. We will thus have greater credibility."

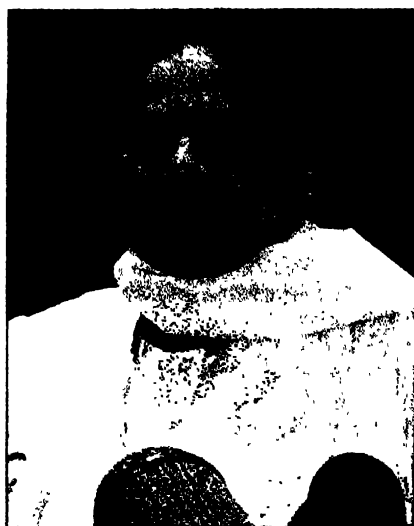
However, the BJP is also clear that it is not to bank on the good performance of its allies beyond a point. Which is why magnifying glasses are already out to scrutinise the results of the 1998 polls in an attempt to adequately arm leaders entrusted with the crucial task of selecting candidates. Therefore, candidate selection will be crucial as the leadership expects strong anti-incumbency sentiment at the constituency level against sitting MPs, who were busy attending Parliament for three months.

Add another three months to the initial euphoria of being victorious. This meant that an average MP spent just a few months interacting with people in their constituencies. That is too less a time to do any good for the people and you cannot make an excuse that we had very little time, so please give me another chance.

Talking to a cross-section of BJP functionaries, it is evident that the party will adopt a fairly systematic method while coming to selecting candidates and drawing up a list of constituencies that require special effort during campaign. BJP sources said that special care has to be taken to ensure that errors are not made like last time when several constituencies were lost because the leadership did not consider its candidate to have a winning chance and thereby did not schedule a campaign meeting of any senior leaders. However, candidate selection and campaign management will greatly depend on the assessment made after detailed scrutiny of the 1998 polls.

The most significant aspect of the

The BJP leadership is scrutinising the results of the 1998 polls to effectively handle the crucial task of selecting candidates for the polls



BJP'S OPPOSITE CAMP:
Sonia Gandhi, Jayalalitha and Mayawati

1998 poll was the all-India growth of the BJP. Despite the fact that the party won only 21 seats more than the 1996 mark of 161, its vote share (minus allies) went up by more than 5 per cent. BJP leaders argue that this was on account of the fact that the BJP candidates did remarkably well even in constituencies where they failed to win. Sources point out that besides winning 182 seats, BJP candidates came second in as many as 141 seats of which nearly 25 were lost by margins of less than 10,000 votes.

Party strategists disclose that special efforts will thus be made for these seats besides focusing on seats where party candidates were victorious. "The attempt this time will be to not just increase our vote share, but also the number of seats," said a BJP leader.

According to the BJP strategists, there has been a significant change in the party's fortunes when compared to the situation in November last, when the BJP was routed in the state Assembly polls in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi. The events in the last few months, starting from the failure of the Congress to get its act together following the BJP debacle, have been to the party's advantage. Coupled with the public perception that the government was destabilised because it was gaining ground on account of diplomatic initiatives with Pakistan and a good Budget, BJP leaders feel that it has been able to repair the damage done to the party's vote bank. "Half the battle is decided by the perceptions of the people and they feel that it is all a foreign-inspired conspiracy led by Sonia Gandhi and President K.R. Narayanan who also has a foreign wife," says a BJP functionary.

In the 1998 polls, the BJP performance had raised eyebrows because it had done particularly well in states and regions that were never considered to be BJP strongholds. This included constituencies ranging from Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Daman and Diu, to Dadra and Nagar Haveli. The states where the BJP performance was much beyond expected included Manipur and Goa where the BJP had so far been treated as a cultural pariah. The image of the party in these states, said BJP leaders, has improved further because of the government's performance in recent months and also because of a stable alliance with a large number of political parties. "People have taken note of the fact that at least two of our current allies (TDP and DMK) were with the Opposi-

tion during the last polls. This adds to our credibility," said a BJP leader.

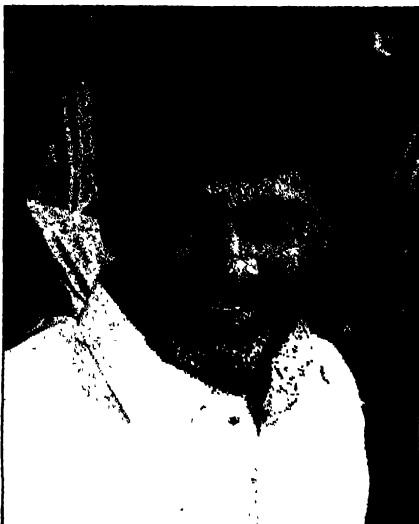
Till the 1998 elections, BJP analysts and independent psephologists have divided the 544 Lok Sabha seats into two categories: one lot where the BJP could hope to win seats, and the other where the party did not have even a remote chance. The total number of seats in the first category was little more than 350, while nearly 200 seats were considered to be completely out of the BJP's reach.

Since the BJP had few allies in different states before the last year's Lok Sabha elections, its coming to power was considered a virtual impossibility as a localised wave situation was imperative for reaching anywhere near the magic mark of 272. However, that numerical equation has altered both on account of the allies that the BJP has managed to win over in the past 18 months and also on account of the party's spread to hitherto virgin areas.

However, the BJP leadership is aware that the final tally of the party and its allies will be determined in the states where the BJP already has a significant presence. These states are UP, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. These four states alone account for 227 seats. In the last elections, the BJP along with allies won 125 of these seats but its performance in Maharashtra was particularly dismal where it won only 9 seats along with its ally Shiv Sena.

The assessment of the BJP is that the party should be able to retain close to the same number of seats in UP and Bihar (58 and 29) despite the resurgence of the Congress in these states. The party hopes to gain by a division in the anti-BJP votes in UP (between Samajwadi Party and the possible Congress-BSP alliance) and expects to make inroads into the Rashtriya Janata Dal's stronghold in north Bihar. Even by the BJP's estimate, the party is going to find it difficult to match its 1998 performance in MP where it won 30 of the 40 seats. The shortfall here, however, is expected to be compensated by the party's improved performance in Maharashtra where BJP leaders claim that the situation has improved considerably following the elevation of Narayan Rane as chief minister.

The BJP also is going to cement some recently-forged alliances. This includes carving out a new political platform in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Haryana.



LIKELY ALLIES: M. Karunanidhi, Chandrababu Naidu and Om Prakash Chautala

The BJP is going to cement some recently-forged alliances. This includes carving out a new political platform with the DMK in Tamil Nadu, TDP in Andhra Pradesh and INLD in Haryana

na. In Tamil Nadu, the party expects to forge an alliance with the DMK and former allies of the AIADMK that have since parted ways with Jayalalitha. With Assembly elections around the corner in Andhra Pradesh, an alliance with the Telugu Desam Party appears more than likely and this should improve the BJP's tally of four seats; it won last time without aligning with Chandrababu Naidu's party. In Haryana, too, the party is expected to contest the polls in alliance with the Indian Lok Dal of Om Prakash Chautala after snapping ties with the Haryana Vikas Party of Bansi Lal.

However, the BJP leadership is not being complacent in regard to the polls. A senior leader stated that a lot would depend on the timing of the elections and the fact that polls for several states Assemblies will be held simultaneously. Local factors thus would have a greater role in these states than in the past. This naturally makes it imperative for the BJP to be more circumspect about candidate selection and managing the campaign. On both counts, the BJP has a lot to do. Says a senior leader, "We have to galvanise the party machinery that has become casual in the past year."

Moreover, the BJP will also have to take some tough decisions with regard to the candidature of some of the senior leaders. The BJP leadership has also to ascertain whether all senior leaders would contest the general elections, because the party might need the services of some of them in the election campaign. •

Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay / New Delhi

VIOLENT STUDS ARE NOT WELCOME

PROVED: When it comes to handling the press, actors aren't the most intelligent of people; they don't know how to talk. In Delhi recently to raise funds for Tibetan refugees, Hollywood's action stud **Steven Seagal** threw etiquette to the winds when he declared during his brief tete-a-tete with the fourth estate that his



experience with the Indian Press was his worst ever. It was the same for us. So what actually triggered the flare-up?

Apparently, a perfectly legitimate question. (Unless, of course, Seagal had come looking for a pretext to fight.) Our brawny hero was asked

by a reporter to explain how someone who so tirelessly preached non-violence and humanity could play such violent roles in films. Instead of clearing the contradiction, Seagal took it kind of personal and lost his cool. "The press," he spat at the assembled journo's, "is the most vulgar example of propagating violence in the society."

You shouldn't have said that Mr Seagal, not to the press anyway. We don't propagate violence, we write *about* violence. And rude, needlessly violent celebs make good copy.

STAR TREK: BOMBAY TO CALCUTTA ■ CALCUTTA TO MADRAS

Attention avid followers of migrant actresses: lest you get confused, this isn't a stopover. Just that, beautiful people are waking up to infinite possibilities of stardom outside their own circle, even beyond their familiar terrain. Because of space constraints we pick up two: Bollywood glamour girl **Mamta Kulkarni** who's travelling east, and Calcutta starlet **Riya Sen** who's headed south

MAMTA KULKARNI

Our seductive heroine says she loves Bengal and Bengalis. And therefore, didn't suffer even a moment's hesitation when she was offered a role in the Bengali film *Bangshadhar* (Heir). That's terrific, pan-Indian mentality; the real reason one gets to know later.

"They did not ask me to reduce my fee," confessed Mamta. "So I had no reason to give the

proposal a miss." That's the frankest statement we've heard from a celeb in months, if not years.



RIYA SEN

Moon Moon Sen's svelte daughter is making her debut, not in Tollywood but in far-off Kodambakkam in the Tamil film *Taj Mahal*. Asked why she is heading south when Hindi films have more to offer, Riya replied, "They are really happening now." But, can Bengali actresses excite Tamil audiences? "Yes!" says Bharathiraja, director of *Taj Mahal*. "Dusky complexion, black hair and big eyes are easily identifiable with Tamil women." Additional assets are traditional looks and histrionic capabilities. Plus, as he says, the killer combination of "sexuality and intelligence". Are we to conclude that the rest are blest with only the former?

HEY, THE RICH AND FAMOUS ARE FRAGRANT PEOPLE TOO

What is it between perfumes and celebrities? Lots, it seems. And we aren't exaggerating. Back in the late Eighties, former Miss India and the nation's sex symbol Zeenat Aman launched her own brand Zeenat. Aman, the natural choice over the 'elusive' Rekha and the 'not-so-classy' Sridevi, had French perfume-makers queuing up to her doorsteps. Next was a man adorably provocative:



Zeenat Aman

Bollywood's current heart-throb Shah Rukh Khan who launched his brand early this year. Now it's the nightingale's turn. At the 28 April press conference at Taj Bombay, Lata Mangeshkar, an avid perfume user, said she

handpicked her brand Lata Eau de Parfum from a range of twenty specially created based on personal preferences. Selecting the right



Lata Mangeshkar



Shah Rukh Khan

fragrance, a blend of 61 ingredients, must have been tough. And the effect? Lyrical, if you go by the musical analogy describing its effects after you've opened the bottle: a top note that is sparkling, fresh, spicy and sensuous. The heart note: delicate floral, enriched with precious jasmine and rose. The dry note: elegant sandal wrapped in the sensuality of musk, oakmoss and patchouli, powdered with the vibrancy of vanilla. Wouldn't be surprised if it smells all the way to the market.



UNSUNG GENIUS

■ We know him as a dancer but he thinks he would've been better as a singer. Never mind, true talent often remains unsung; what counts is self-belief. **Shiamak Davar's** debut album *Mohabbat Kar Le* didn't exactly crack the Hindi music market, but the nifty dancer, unperturbed by the lack of response, is almost out with his second. He is giving it finishing touches. Davar, who's currently



choreographing a number for Subhash Ghai's forthcoming movie *Taal*, was asked what his latest album would sound like. "It's all about new

sounds," he replied. "Something folk, something pop. Actually, it's difficult to categorise." We guessed as much.

With a little bit of push from the government, cellphone operators feel they can rope in more callers

When the electrician called liberalisation connected India to the rest of the world, the cellular phone came in. Just like our grand hopes of liberalisation itself, the sellers of these tiny handsets felt that the gadgets would be used by the average middle-class Indian.

But, somewhere, there was a cross-connection. Cellular phones were in circulation, but only within the society's ivory tower cells. And even there, people were hesitant about using the sets too much, and for too long.

The figures do the talking. India was off the starting blocks fast, but could not sustain the initial momentum. Having taken off at a similar time, China now ropes in one million customers a month. The cellular penetration is about 1.6 per cent. The number of subscribers in China has crossed the 20-million mark. In India the corresponding figures are 0.1 per cent and a million subscribers.

Cellphone companies should have known that though India's 250-million middle-class suggested a huge market size, not all of them could afford these sets. Explains Ranjivit Singh, director, mobile phones and terminals, Ericsson: "If you look at penetration levels in terms of population, it doesn't make sense in case of India. We have to talk about the addressable population which is about 20 to 30 million."

Enlightenment has finally dawned, it seems. It had to, after the stagnant growth in the metros last year. After the initial enthusiasm, the laggards did not follow suit. The 'feel good' factor, essential to make the cellular phone thrive, just was not there. Were the recessionary trends responsible? Operators disagree, and blame the regulatory framework. Throughout last year, Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) struggled to establish its sovereignty as its suggestions on the telecom policy were deliberated upon repeatedly. And since most of these suggestions were crucial for this nascent industry's survival,

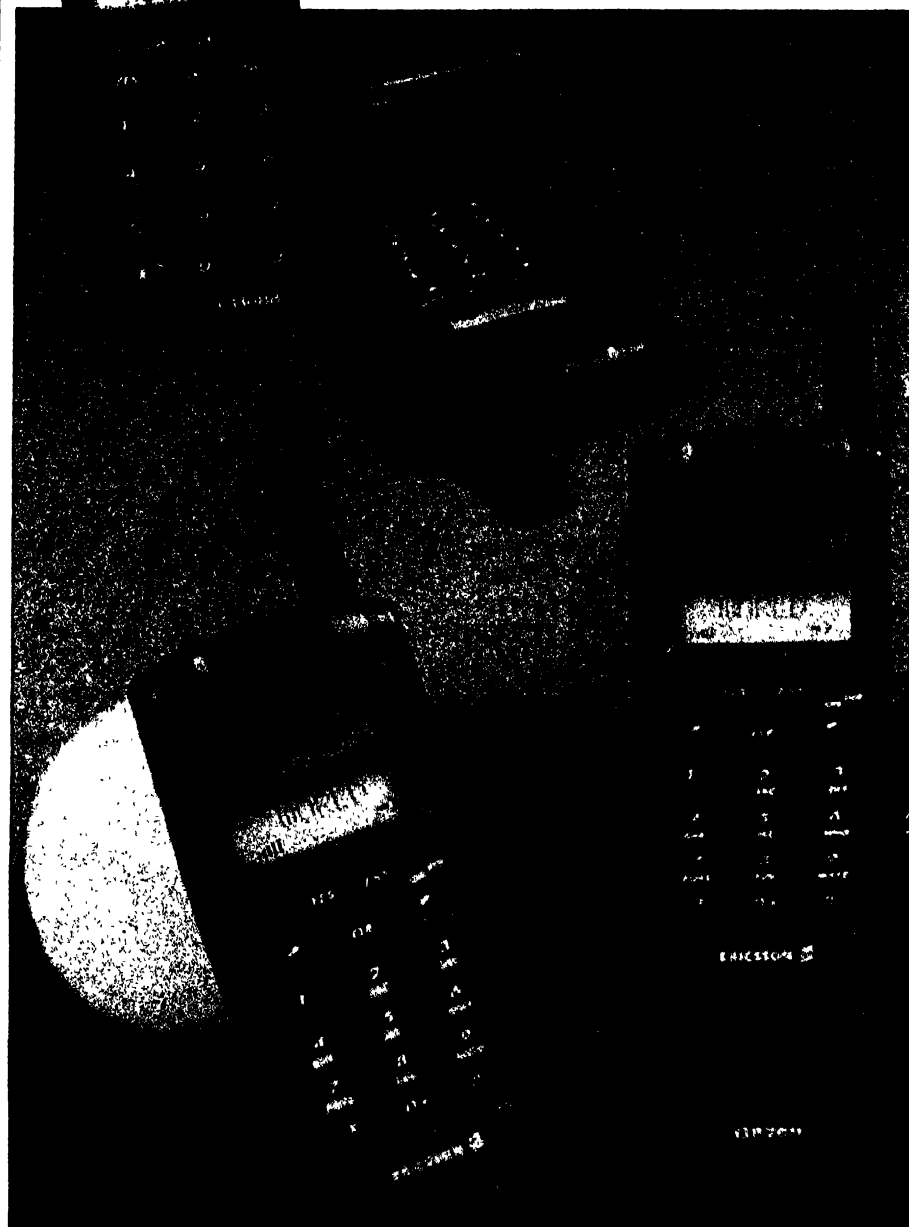
operators were eagerly waiting for some landmark policies.

It seems their prayers have been answered. After the telecom tangle, a telecom policy has finally come into being. With effect from 1 May, airtime rates have been reduced by as much as 64 per cent. Now, the rate during peak

hours is Rs 6 per minute and Rs 4 at other times — a substantial fall from the earlier rate of Rs 16.80 per minute.

But with monthly rentals climbing high (from Rs 156 to Rs 600), the customer isn't quite the king yet, not till he has to pay for incoming calls. The real value addition that operators and con-

Let's



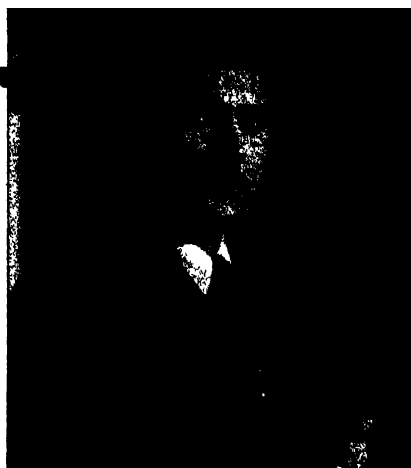
talk

sumers are waiting for is the calling party pay regime. Says Rajiv Burman, chief sales and marketing officer, Escotel: "Paying for incoming calls on the land lines is not what consumers do and they do not see any reason why they should do so on mobile phones. Thanks to this TRAI proposal which will be implemented from 1 August onwards, the entire ball game will change and business will really explode." A positive note there for the operators.

But existing operators are still trapped in the licence-fee arrangement. The policy ignores the dilemma of the existing players who cannot possibly exit and return to take advantage of the revenue-sharing formula. They are relying on the attorney-general who will determine whether, and how, they can migrate to the new policy framework.

Says Navaid Khan, business operations chief of ESSAR, "Till the revenue-sharing formula is sorted out, operators will find it difficult to sustain themselves. And it will affect growth of the industry." Currently the operators are focussing on controlling costs until the regulatory changes materialise and a decision is taken on revenue-sharing because it has been a very high-cost operation all the way.

But have such apprehensions deterred product launches or competition in the market? Says Sanjay Kapoor, chief operating officer, Air Tel: "Competition is healthy but not on price. Given the current circumstances we, as a com-



SANJAY KAPOOR

"We [Air Tel] have tried to distinguish the services, the quality of service delivery and the quality of network that we offer"

pany, have tried to distinguish the services, the quality of service delivery, and the quality of network we offer." Both Air Tel and Essar have announced similar packages to lure the consumer. With pre-paid cards enticing the price-sensitive Indian, the market is expected to open up in a big way. Marketers say this is a strategy to seed the market without defocussing the normal distribution channel that targets the serious user.

For instance, at Air Tel, there are two segments — Air Tel (post-paid) and Magic (pre-paid). Air Tel is the premium, exclusive, suave, leadership brand while Magic is more simple, mass market and vibrant. Separate distribution channels cater to these two brands. Pre-paid cards are popular because there is a certainty of fixed expenditure — there are no hassles over verification as there are no bills to send. Recharge coupons cost an affordable Rs 500 to Rs 250.

To top it all, separate distribution channels are being aligned to market these products. Distribution of these ready-to-use gadgets through the

FMCG distributor chain has revolutionised the market. The reach will be immense once more retail outlets are roped in.

Operators will gain through these cards as they will save on operational costs that were quite high for low-end users. Besides they have been paying a licence-fee to the government on the basis of the number of subscribers. The weaning away of low-end users to pre-paid cards would thus benefit them.

The normal distribution channel for the contract customer will definitely be rich on human interface. Exclusive services for high-end customers, like delivering bills through courier, will be crucial for brand building.

Besides, a whole lot of value-added services are being introduced. Intelligent network platform launched for the pre-paid card is among the top 20 services (fax, e-mail etc.) available in any part of the world. But as far as database services are concerned, the country is lagging behind. Cellphone banking is still not available.

While the operators are expecting a boom, the handset manufacturers are still contending with 49 per cent import duties. With the grey market commanding almost half the market share, they are perhaps justified in their demands. In the US, handsets are provided free of cost to customers. "The value addition that the consumer finds from buying in the grey market is tremendous in terms of pricing," agrees Ericsson's Ranjivit Singh. He adds: "Once the import duties are reduced, the addressable population remains the issue no longer. The issue is of penetration levels: how many people start using it within the family, within the social circle and within the network. That's when consumer maturity starts happening." But that hasn't prevented manufacturers from introducing top-of-the-line products.

Says Sanjeev Sharma, head of marketing and strategy, Nokia Mobile Phones: "The mobile phone today is more than just about talking. It is all about personalisation of products. It may be personalisation of hardware, of software or of content. You can change the covers of the cellphone to match your outfit, select the tune of the tinkle as well as download personal content from the Internet."

Great things come in small packages: that is how the cellular phone is being positioned in the communications mart. With the hope that the consumer will do the talking. •

Devdatta Das/New Delhi



RANJIVIT SINGH

"Once the import duties are reduced, the issue is that of penetration levels: how many people start using it within the family, within the social circle"



On a Muggy Night in Mumbai

AT HOME, WITH ENGLISH

Desi themes performed in the Queen's language are attracting theatre buffs in India

The lights come on. On the stage are ten men, dressed in long, flowing saffron robes, sacred threads strung around their bodies and hair tied in little knots at the back of their heads. They conduct a fire worship to the chanting of Sanskrit *shlokas*. A little later, the actor playing the king explodes: "No, impossible. It's not possible."

Nothing unusual about anything of this play in progress. The setting is Indi-

an, the actors are Indian, apparently even the theme is Indian. The only difference being that the saffron-robed actors enacting a tale from an Indian epic speak their lines in English.

The scene is from Girish Karnad's original Kannada play *The Fire and the Rain*, now being staged in English, directed by Arjun Sajnani. At the end of the three-hour tour de force of a little-known myth from the Mahabharat, the audience is impressed enough to give a

standing ovation. Sajnani, the showman par excellence of English language theatre in India today, is, naturally thrilled. "The audience reception shows that as far as English theatre is concerned in the country," he gushes, "it has become Indian."

There are others, at this very moment, doing English language productions of plays with intrinsically Indian themes. If Rahul da Cunha adapted *I am Not Rappaport* into an Indianised *I am Not*

Dattani, once asked why he did not write in his

Baaji Rao, Lillette Dubey directed noted Marathi playwright Mahesh Elkunchwar's *Atmakatha* as *Autobiography*. The grand old man of English theatre in the country, Alyque Padamsee, has presented several of Sahitya Akademi-winner Mahesh Dattani's plays rooted in a contemporary urban Indian milieu.

So, does all this mean that English language theatre in this country, which, for a long time, meant Neil Simon or Ibsen or even Tom Stoppard, has finally, and successfully, moved on to 'Indian theatre in English'?

Not fully yet, according to many people in the field, but it is well on its way there. Because, as they see it, English theatre's search for relevance is making it move gradually away from American comedies and British classics towards an Indian ethos.

As Bombay-based director-producer Lillette Dubey puts it, "Our English language theatre has no tradition. Zero. All we did earlier was Western plays as best as we could. I feel that if English theatre in the country has to have any credibility, it has to adhere to its own roots, place, time and have a sense of where it is coming from. That, I think, is happening now." Her seven-year-old group, Prime Time, does only English plays with an Indian setting.

Dattani's Bangalore-based group Playpen is promoting both Indian scripts written originally in English and translations of contemporary plays from regional languages. When it collaborated with British director Michael Walling to stage Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the play was adapted to an Indian milieu.

Thus Prospero was shown as an Indian king while the shipwrecked visitors to the island were depicted as the colonising imperialist Whites. While nothing was lost in the indianised version, it gained by offering a fresh and different perspective to an old classic.

The gradual indigenisation of English theatre in the country is because of the increasing feeling among English theatre activists to not only address the issues around them, but also to reach them to the audience. "These days, it is becoming difficult to do plays which do not have a context that is relevant to us," says actor-director Prakash Belawadi. "To pretend to be somebody in New



Scenes from *Dance Like a Man* (left), *Jaya* — the Victory (middle) and *Come and See My City from Here*

York set even in Lahore is far more relevant to us since we share a common heritage, including corrupt political systems, class struggles and growing violence."

A feeling Dubey echoes. Involved in theatre for more than two decades, she has gone through the entire gamut of the theatrical tradition from Greek tragedies to American comedies. However, when it came to producing and directing herself, she chose to stick to Indian themes. "There were two reasons," she explains, "Firstly, there are zillions of people around the world doing Western plays. Secondly, however wonderful the work was, I began to feel it was still alien to me."

When she found that even cosmetically altered adaptations of Western plays evoked a tremendously different response within herself as an artiste and also with the audience, Dubey decided to do only plays with Indian themes. The decision was easily taken but finding plays good enough to

stage was difficult.

"There simply were not enough Indian plays being written in English, or even translated from Indian languages," she says. "To access them was very difficult. Not many wrote them, few published them and bookstores and libraries hardly ever stocked them. Finding a good play was like hunting in the dark."

Yet, some theatre artistes maintained that Indian theatre in English ought to find a voice of its own. "Earlier, English theatre might have been a

York, doing things that someone in New York would do, is tiresome because it just doesn't strike a chord here."

own language, merely smiled and said, "I do"

snob-value event patronised only by the well-heeled," points out Belawadi, "but it slowly changed. There was an audience waiting for meaningful theatre, waiting for good theatre for the sake of theatre."

That is something even Westernised people like Sajnani, who has earlier put up spectacular shows of Broadway hits like *M Butterfly* and *Kiss of the Spiderwoman*, are now happily discovering. "Though I have never directed an Indian play before," he gushes, "I am thrilled to be doing it. This play is almost Wagnerian, Greek, Shakespearean in scale and yet, full of Indian sensibilities."

For Sajnani, directing his first Indian play was like going back to his roots. When pointed out that most urban English theatre audience have nothing in common with the other bigger India which has to do with traditional arts, ancient myths and centuries of culture, Sajnani says: "Beneath my outer Western self is an inner Indian me. Working on this play helped me look inside myself since I responded to it on emotional, spiritual, intellectual and theatrical levels. I want the audience to do that too."

As with the director, even actors on the English stage find themselves at an advantage when playing Indian characters. Ashok Mandanna, one of National School of Drama's finest products, says, "Personally, as an actor, I find an enormous difference in approaching the role of an Indian character. With a Western character — be it Shakespearean or Chekovian — one approaches the core from the outside, from the attire and the mannerism to the emotion inside. Here, the emotional aspect comes naturally. After all, it is a man called Ashok playing a character called Parvasu in an Indian play called *The Fire and the Rain*."

These are times when Indian writers in



Mahesh Dattani conducting an acting-playwriting workshop

English are almost creeping out of the woodwork. The most famous first one off the block, Salman Rushdie, had this to say in his now famous introduction to Indian fiction in the *New Yorker* last year, "Whatever language we Indians write in, we drink from the same well. India, that inexhaustible horn of plenty, nourishes us all." Well, that might be true of versifiers and writers of prose. Sadly, the same is not the case with English playwrights in the country.

Dattani stands in solitary splendour. The Sahitya Akademi Award last year took him by surprise. "I feel I am finally accepted as an Indian playwright."

Dattani is now holding playwriting workshops at his studio in Bangalore. "New talent has to be found if English theatre in the country has to

evolve and develop credibility," explains Dattani. With the increasing acceptance of Indian themes in English plays, more playwrights will emerge.

The success enjoyed by Dattani's plays, set in middle-class English-speaking urban Indian homes and dealing with issues pertinent to them, shows that there is indeed a big audience out there. After all, there is an entire generation of English-speaking urban Indians who want to see characters called not Harry but

Hasmukh Mehta, not Alice but Alka Trivedi. They want characters who talk about things which concern them and in a language they are comfortable with.

Dattani was once asked why he did not 'write in his own language' by a college student. Dattani merely smiled before replying: "I do." His is certainly not the Queen's English; it is Indian English, right from the syntax to the sensibilities. So much so that his comedy *Where There is a Will* has been translated into Gujarati and over a hundred shows held. *Final Solutions*, on the subject of communal tensions, has been translated into and staged in Kannada.

And, the sponsors' reluctance to favour anything with an Indian subject is gradually changing. They don't seem to mind spending money on events with a non-Western connotation. The premier of *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* was sponsored by Gilbeys, *Come See My City from Here* was backed by Titan and Tata Tea and *Dance Like a Man* was bankrolled by Citibank.

"It is amazing, the kind of response you get when you stage a play the audience can relate to," points out Dubey, referring to her production of Dattani's *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* which centres around homosexuality. "The audiences' reaction was simply tremendous, given the subject."

"I feel, English theatre in India," concludes Dattani, "has come of age." Now's the moment for some more Dattanis, Dubeys and Sajnanis — who were probably waiting in the wings — to come out and take their place under the arc lights. •

Gauri Lankesh/Bangalore



LILLETTE DUBEY

"If English theatre in the country has to have any credibility, it has to adhere to its own roots, place and time"

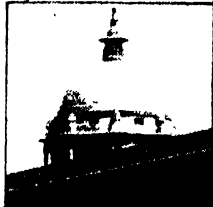


MAHESH DATTANI

"Why look Westwards when you can find things right in your neighbourhood?"

Chinese chequers

An across-the-board improvement in Sino-Indian relations is achieved



It is remarkable that despite the fall of the Vajpayee government, China showed not the slightest hesitation to resume the Delhi-Beijing dialogue after a wholly avoidable year-long chill in bilateral relations. On the contrary, the Chinese side showed welcome enthusiasm for putting last year's row behind and advocating an across-the-board

improvement in Sino-Indian relations. Foreign secretary K. Raghunath had gone to Beijing for the long-delayed meeting of the Joint Working Group (JWG) set up after Rajiv Gandhi's crucial visit to in December 1988. He and his delegation were



K. Raghunath with Tang Jiaxuan in New Delhi

received with warmth and cordiality not only by his opposite number, Yang Wenchang, but also by a galaxy of Chinese dignitaries including Qian Qichen, vice-premier in-charge of foreign relations, foreign minister Tang Jiaxuan, and Xu Dunxin, vice-chairman of the foreign relations committee of the National People's Congress (NPC), the Chinese Parliament. Judging by well-established Chinese diplomatic norms, such access is not given to countries to which Beijing might be indifferent. For Raghunath personally, this is a historic vindication. During the cultural revolution, as first secretary in the Indian Embassy, he was viciously attacked by Red Guards.

The atmosphere throughout the talks was highly congenial. Emphasis was on friendliness and cooperation. Authoritative Chinese sources, including Cheng Risheng, a former ambassador to India, and Jiang Chunyun, a vice-chairman of the standing committee of the NPC, simultaneously hinted publicly

that issues like Sikkim's membership of the Indian family were likely to be resolved.

More to the point was the content of remarks made by the Chinese vice-premier and foreign minister. Both swore by Panch Sheel or the five principles of peaceful coexistence, authored jointly by Jawaharlal Nehru and Zhou Enlai. Both the Chinese dignitaries said that these principles should guide not only bilateral relations but the entire international community. This has to be read together with Qian's significant statement that the world order needed to be "democratised", that the world should be "multi-polar", not dominated by a single power or a small group of powers, and that India and China should play their due role in a multi-polar world.

The word sovereignty figured in the observations of the Chinese leaders more than once which clearly indicates that China's government has done some hard thinking on NATO's aggression on Yugoslavia and the ominous new doctrine propounded on the military alliance's 50th birthday.

All this should be built upon, as much by the caretaker government as by the one that is yet to be elected. Tang made it a point to convey warm greetings to Jaswant Singh and to say that he was looking forward to receiving the Indian foreign minister in the Chinese capital in May. This date must be kept.

Indeed, all the current conversations with countries like Pakistan and the US must also continue. To be sure, no new commitments can be made, and even the ones already made can be implemented only after the polls. But talks need not be interrupted. Nawaz Sharif has expressed some doubts on this score which are understandable. But he is unlikely to be unresponsive to the idea of Indian and Pakistani foreign secretaries sticking to their schedule of meeting in the month of May.

Talks with the US look like being put on hold more because Strobe Talbott is too busy with the mess the US has chosen to make in the Balkans than for any other reasons. Moreover, Americans are realistic enough to realise that their main demand that India sign the CTBT well before September has gone by the board.

To revert to the key relationship with China, the vital point is that while the progress made during Raghunath's parleys in Beijing must be applauded, it would be naive to believe that all is once again hunky-dory. Far from it.

China's basic position on India's nuclear and missile programmes remains unchanged. Beijing sticks to the UN Security Council's resolution 1172 that demands adherence not only to the CTBT but also to the NPT and to a freeze on missiles programme. However, it should not be overlooked that countries like Japan are making the same demands even more stridently.

The JWG's progress in resolving the boundary issue is excruciatingly slow and needs to be hastened. Happily, both sides are equally cognisant of this. It is China's help to Pakistan's nuclear and missiles development where the rub lies. China's lofty position that it hasn't done, nor would it do, anything to "harm" India, is no help when the receiving country's motivation might be different. •

A softer, gentler, user-

For the Bharatiya Janata Party leaders it was more than just another meeting at the Parliament Annexe. During the week after the government lost the vote of confidence in Parliament, the BJP had been meeting its allies at the annexe almost on a daily basis. The ostensible reason for the get-togethers was that the coalition needed to chalk out its strategy. But everyone knew that unless the President of India gave his go-ahead and asked Atal Behari Vajpayee to stake claim again, there was precious little such meetings could achieve. Except to work as a morale booster — and as some cynics pointed out, to serve as a head-count to see which of the allies were still with the coalition.

The daily roll-call worked. It was with some pride that Vajpayee announced at a rally in New Delhi that while the Congress and its allies sought separate appointments to meet the President, the BJP and its coalition partners always went to Rashtrapati Bhavan in one group.

And later, when the BJP's national executive met at the Parliament Annexe in Delhi, Vajpayee reiterated this point. It was at this meeting that the party decided to put its headline issues on the back-burner and instead to fight the oncoming elections as a coalition along with the rest of its allies. For this purpose, it was agreed that the party would not fight the elections on its own manifesto, but instead take the National Agenda for Governance to the people: '*Ek Neta, Ek Karyakaram*' would be the slogan of the coalition. (And so what if allies like Mamata Banerjee stated that they would come out with their own manifesto; the BJP would still stick by the NAG, regardless.)

In other words, the party was not going to raise its three contentious issues: the imposition of a uniform civil code, the promise of building a temple at Ayodhya and revoking the use of Article 370 in Kashmir.

A BJP without a dominant Hindutva agenda? An RSS ready to go slow on its demand for building a temple at Ayo-



The party executive in Delhi may have been called at a short notice, but it was certainly more momentous than any of the others which have preceded it. It was here that the BJP decided to forgo rhetoric for reality

dhya? An L.K. Advani who quipped that party hardliners would not mind compromising on these basic issues, since according to the press, he is one such hardliner and he does not mind? An Atal Behari Vajpayee who said that he would contest these elections — despite having said that he would not fight another Lok Sabha poll — on the grounds that he was not allowed to complete his full term?

Clearly, the BJP was now ready to do *anything* for another shot at 'able leader and good-governance'.

friendly BJP

The BJP puts its contentious issues on the backburner for another chance at the Centre



The national executive had another agenda: to ascertain the party's position in various states. An ebullient Venkaiah Naidu briefed the press that all the state presidents had assured the national leaders of a 'clean sweep' in their respective areas. (And these varied from Andhra to Orissa.) For instance, Naidu told reporters, the Janata Dal in Orissa had still to make up its mind whether it wanted to go with the BJP or the BJD. "We win either way," he said, adding, "in Haryana also, both Bansi Lal and Chautala want to align with us." Another executive member from Rajasthan

said he was sure that the party would win as many as 300 seats this time round. And, he added, he was not being unduly optimistic.

Which just makes one wonder whether the executive achieved anything more than a chance for BJP leaders to have tea and samosas together — after the mandatory afternoon 'vishram' of course.

There was, however, one interesting sideshow at the meet. Those who were noticing, said that Sushma Swaraj had been sulking at the executive in Goa as well, but nobody had paid any attention to her. This time round, she decided that she had to do something drastic if she wanted to be noticed. So, she told the other executive members that she would not be contesting the coming elections. Instead, she would devote herself to 'organisational matters'. When questioned further, she said mysteriously, "Har sawal ka jawab nahin hota hai."

Unfortunately, her stock is so low in the party that few bought this line of self-sacrifice. The uncharitable commented that Sushma was scared that she would lose this election and that is why she has chosen to opt out. "She is scared that [M.L.] Khuranaji would work against her," said a party member, adding, "this is a good tactical move. Later, she can always say that she made a sacrifice for the party and ask for a Rajya Sabha seat."

And if this is indeed her game plan, Sushma is certainly working hard for her Rajya Sabha nomination. She walked out of the meeting on the first day to make a call on her mobile. It was clear that she was discussing the possibilities of continuing the alliance with the Haryana Vikas Party in the state.

Another person who spent more time outside rather than inside was the parliamentary affairs minister, P.R. Kumaramangalam. In fact, his quest for a cigarette made him miss the beginning of Advani's speech. But he was lucky; a diligent Pramod Mahajan briefed him on all that he had missed. (Ranga wanted to make sure he had done his homework — just in case Advani checked!)

After the fun and the games, it was time for some serious stock-taking: the

party executive in Delhi may have been called at a short notice, but it was certainly more momentous than any of the others which have preceded it. For it was here that the BJP decided to forgo rheto-



Venkaiah Naidu said that all state presidents had assured the national leaders of a clean sweep in their respective areas

ric for reality; and it was here that the party was finally baptised into the politics of a coalition dharma.

Ironically, it was for this so-called secular outlook that Vajpayee was pulled up by the party nearly a decade ago. So, it is only fitting that a softer, gentler and a more user-friendly BJP goes to the polls with him at the helm. •

Priya Sahgal/New Delhi

"Sonia Gandhi will lose even if she contests from Amethi"

That's the prediction of UP chief minister Kalyan Singh



Politics, they say, breeds strange bedfellows. And, why not? In a chaotic, embattled arena where only power and survival matter, nothing, apparently, is irrational. Witness Uttar Pradesh. BJP strongman and the state's chief minister Kalyan Singh appears to have made up with his (should we say former?) bete noire Mulayam Singh Yadav, the Samajwadi Party boss and a former CM. The two have a common enemy in the Congress and, in particular, its president Sonia Gandhi, the 52-year-old, Italian-born widow of Rajiv Gandhi. Kalyan Singh himself blurts it out straight. The BJP's game plan, he says, will be to target Sonia's foreign origin.

Yet, barely weeks back, the chief minister himself had been gasping for breath when some of his colleagues began an oust-Kalyan signature campaign, even taking their grievance to the central leadership. Reprieve, however, came with the collapse of the 13-month BJP-led coalition government. Just months away from elections, a change of guard in a state that sends 85 MPs to the Lok Sabha is bad politics. So, Kalyan Singh survived and came out of temporary hibernation but only after he got the assurance from the central leadership that he would continue at the helm.

In this candid interview to SUNDAY, the chief minister speaks about his party's prospects in the coming polls, Mayawati's 'betrayal' at the vote of confidence and his own dissidence-riven flock. Excerpts:

SUNDAY: You seem to have some kind of understanding with Mulayam Singh Yadav. You appreciated what he had to say about Sonia Gandhi?

Kalyan Singh: I praise Mulayam Singh Yadav for his active role in preventing a foreign rule in India.

Q: Are you referring to Sonia Gandhi as a foreigner?

A: We'll go to the people asking them whether they want a swadeshi or a *videshi* Prime Minister. In other words, it's going to be Atal versus Sonia.

Q: Don't you think Sonia Gandhi's entry would brighten the prospects of the Congress?

A: Sonia Gandhi will lose even if she contests from Amethi. The people of this country may be illiterate but they are not immature as to not understand what's good or bad for them.

Q: Considering that both the BJP and the Samajwadi Party would target Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin, wouldn't the electoral battle in UP turn somewhat peculiar?

A: As far as we are concerned, the Samajwadi Party will remain our main opponent in UP where the Congress is virtually non-existent. At the national level, of course, the battle will be between the BJP and the Congress only.

Q: How do you think a common slogan from two rivals will work against a third foe?

A: So what? There have been several instances where the same slogan was raised by rival political parties against a third party. That's what we will be doing in UP. Whenever two parties raise a common slogan against a third party, the voter tilts in favour of the stronger contender which, in this case, will be our party.

Q: How can you write off the Congress now that its revival in UP appears to be on the cards?

A: That's an illusion. In fact, the recent failure of the Congress to provide an alternative government at the Centre will be yet another major election issue against them. This will again go in our favour. People are going to ask the Congress why it had to leave the country in a state of instability and force another election on them when it couldn't cobble up enough support to provide an alternative

government.

Q: You are again echoing Mulayam Singh's sentiments. He squarely blames the Congress for forcing another mid-term poll on the people.

A: It's sheer coincidence.

the BJP this time. Apart from a sympathy wave, people simply cannot see any alternative to the BJP which alone can provide a stable government to the nation. After all, people will decide whether they want a stable government for five years or a mid-term poll every year.



"We'll go to the people asking them whether they want a swadeshi or a *videshi* Prime Minister. In other words, it's going to be Atal versus Sonia"

Q: How do you rate the BJP's prospects?

A: I'm confident of taking our tally well above 60 of the 85 seats in UP.

Q: What makes you think your party can win more seats than last time?

A: The fall of our government at the Centre has clearly demonstrated the importance of every single vote in a democracy. People have realised that a single vote has cost them Rs 1,100 crore, the amount to be spent on the elections now. In the light of such a situation, I'm confident of a large turnout of voters who'd want to give a clear majority to

Q: Is there any other factor?

A: The 13-month performance of the Vajpayee government and my own 18-month performance would work as major assets. Whether it was tackling terrorism in Kashmir, the Cauvery water dispute, the diplomacy front where he earned laurels for opening up the Indo-Pak border or raising the nation's prestige by making it a nuclear power, credit goes to Vajpayee.

Q: Don't you think the current infighting in the state BJP and continued dissidence against you can harm your party's prospects?

A: I don't consider this dissidence. If a handful of persons go on harping on things like this, they are causing harm only to themselves, not to the party. I wonder why some people were going on issuing press statements when the party's top leadership, including Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, home minister L.K. Advani and BJP chief Kushabhau Thakre, had categorically ruled out any change in the UP leadership.

Q: Yet they continue to voice their grouse against you. They feel your continuance in office could seriously affect the BJP's poll prospects.

A: Today, there is a major challenge before the party. We've to have our own majority, so all of us should forget petty



"Anyone who reposes faith in Mayawati will only receive betrayal in return"



"I praise Mulayam Singh Yadav for his active role in preventing a foreign rule in India"

matters. After all, we have to fight for a greater cause—a cause of national interest. We should jointly face the challenge.

Q: Their main grouse against you is that

aware of her significant contribution to the party.

Q: Your proximity to her has turned her into a key power-centre?

little game plan at the vote of confidence?

A: As far as I am concerned, I've never had the least trust in the Bahujan Samaj Party leader. Even on the day Mayawati was proclaiming in the House that she would abstain, I had told some colleagues that she would vote against us. I know from experience. After all, she cheated us two times in UP. She does not play politics, she strikes deals. And let me tell you, anyone who reposes faith in Mayawati will only receive betrayal in return.

Q: Your own partymen think differently. They say, if you had agreed to step down, then, probably, the Vajpayee government would have been saved...

A: I pity the political understanding of such people who still cannot see what Mayawati is made of.

Q: You mean to say that even if you had agreed to relinquish office accepting Mayawati's precondition that you be replaced as UP chief minister, she would still have betrayed in the same manner?

A: I have already said that Mayawati cannot be relied upon. In any case, no outsider has any business to dictate terms to our party. Yes, if my party leadership tells me to quit, I will not take a minute to step down from office. I must praise my party's central leadership for not falling into her trap and succumb to her blackmailing.

Q: Much is said about your objectionable style of functioning where there is neither scope for suggestion nor objectivity and decisions are taken under undue influence of a select few...

A: To be *duvidha-mukta* (doubt free), *bhay-mukta* (fear-free), *chinta-mukta* (tension free) and *anuchit-dabav-mukta* (undue pressure free) is the crux of my style of functioning. So tell me, where

"I'm confident of a large turnout of voters who'd want to give a clear majority to the BJP this time"

you have propped up a small-time party-worker like Kusum Rai whose rise has naturally become an eyesore for many?

A: Whatever was being spread around was the product of perverted minds. Whatever she has achieved was purely on merit. Even top party leaders are now

A: That is just a canard. When I do not let my son interfere in the administration, then how can I allow Kusum Rai's interference.

Q: Doesn't it go to the BJP's discredit that even being at the helm of affairs, its leaders couldn't anticipate Mayawati's

lies the need for any change. Let me also tell you, whenever there is any trouble, I do not do *chinta* (worry) but believe in *chintan* (thinking) that keeps me free of all tension. •

Interviewed by Sharat Pradhan/Lucknow

Independence Day

Chandernagore celebrates 50 years of freedom from French rule

Chandernagore, a town on the Banks of the Hooghly in West Bengal, is celebrating 50 years of freedom. The town has its own definitive colonial history, as different from that of India's. Chandernagore was a pocket of French colony, within the much-larger British colony in the 18th and 19th centuries. Stretched over just 4 sq miles, it has been ruled by the French for 250 years, before becoming a part of the Indian Union on 2 May, 1950.

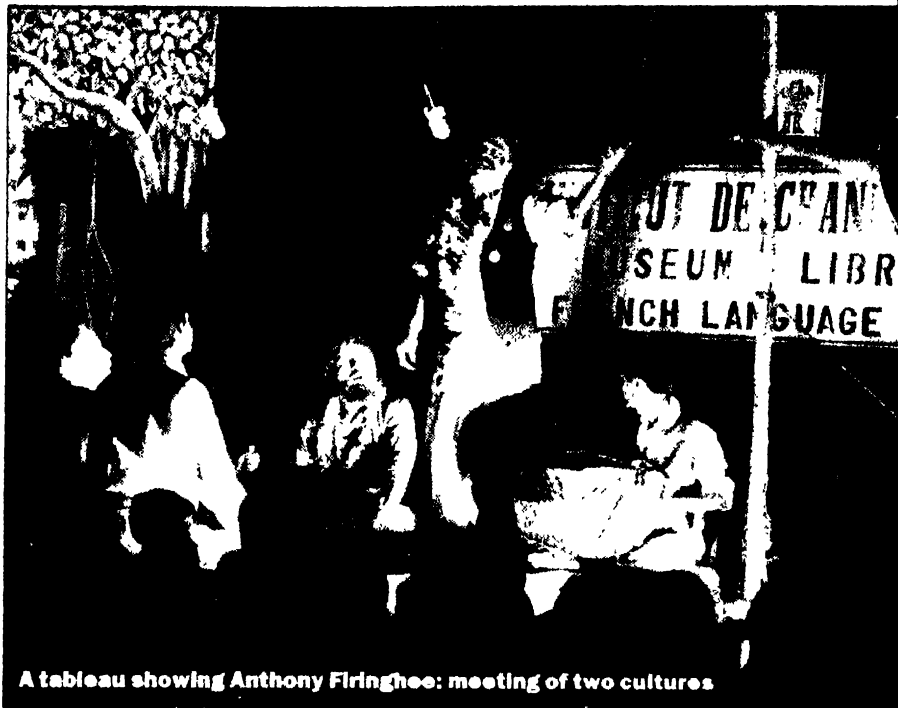
The French traders who came and settled around this port town at the turn of the 17th century, had given a boost to textiles trade in the region. Says Barendra-nath Makar, assistant curator, French Institute of Chandernagore, "They popularised the handwoven silk textiles of Farasdanga and wooden handicrafts which used to be exported in bulk all over Europe." The revenue earned went into the development of the town. Chandernagore became a combination of urban, civic lifestyle and a centre of thriving cultural activities.

After the British left India on 15 August, 1947, Chandernagore residents wanted absolute freedom from French rule. On 14 August there was a discussion with the then French governor. It was decided that both Indian and French flags would fly over the Governor's House. But the natives of Chandernagore would have none of it. They erected the Indian flag on Governor's House.

It was no longer possible to ignore the growing demand for self-rule. A decision was arrived at in Paris Parliament that an administrative council comprising natives and supervised by French officers will look after the affairs of the town. Harihar Sett was nominated the first president of the administrative council.

Elected members of the council attended French Parliament, where policies were drafted and Acts passed. Local education, health, rationing etc. were conducted locally in keeping with those Acts. This council was active till 9 June 1952.

On 27 November, 1947, residents of Chandernagore raised a demand for making the town a free and autonomous one.



A tableau showing Anthony Firinghee: meeting of two cultures

On 19 June, 1949, Chandernagore residents were asked to vote, stating their choices of either remaining a French colony or joining the Indian Union. Ninety-six per cent people were in favour of joining India. Transfer of power, from the French rulers to the India government, happened on 2 May, 1950. On 2 February, 1951, the Treaty of Cession of Chandernagore was signed between the President of French Republic and President of India at Paris. On 2 October, 1954, the town of Chandernagore was merged with West Bengal to constitute a subdivisional town in keeping with the Merger Act.

Chandernagorites are celebrating their freedom year with lot of pomp and gaiety. On 2 May, the year-long festival was inaugurated at 8.40 am, with army helicopters showering flowers over Dupleix Palace, the official residence of the governor. The Indian flag was hoisted by Bhabani Mukhopadhyay, an eminent political leader and a veteran. The function was attended by ministers Pratim Chatterjee, Subhash Chakraborty (who got a bird's eye-view of the celebra-

tions from the helicopter) and Mayor Amiya Das. All day long, telephones under the Chandernagore Exchange beeped a recorded message: "Celebrate 2 May, the golden jubilee of Chandernagore's Independence Day." Little wonder then that the entire town should be out on the streets in the evening when the illuminations on the festival gates were all lit up.

In the morning, young people from schools and colleges went around the town in processions. Later, ten tableaux were taken out by clubs and institutions. Among them, the one showing Anthony Firinghee, a French minstrel who enchanted the locals with his music and his fondness for Indian culture, and that of Harihar Sett conversing with a French dignitary attracted a lot of attention.

It was an atmosphere full of magic, fantasy and nostalgia as one strolled leisurely along the illuminated strand, under a sky sparkling with firecrackers. The celebrations will continue for a year. •

Pradip Sanyal/Chandernagore

Survival strategy

Laloo Yadav transfers 274 public servants to suit his purpose before the coming elections

Strange are the ways of the RJD government in Bihar. While its apathy towards developmental work in the state is only too well-known, the Rabri Devi-led state machinery seems to be suddenly going overboard in the matter of transferring IAS and IPS officials and non-gazetted officials on a mass scale.

The process began within 24 hours of the dissolution of Parliament. It was clear that mid-term elections were inevitable. And till such time as a new government was voted in, the Election Commission's ban on transfers of bureaucrats would be effective. But Rashtriya Janata Dal national president, Laloo Prasad Yadav, acted fast. Overnight, he managed to get his favourites, considered to be within the bracket of his 'social justice', posted at key posts, while many others were either shunted or simply kept 'waiting for posting'.

The story dates back a little further. After a series of massacres and criminal incidents in Bihar, including the state capital of Patna, the Union Government, led by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, had recommended that Article 356 be invoked in Bihar. On 12 February, President's Rule was imposed on the state.

To tackle the steadily deteriorating law and order situation, then Governor Sunder Singh Bhandari initiated a few changes in the bureaucracy, especially at the helm. Overnight, V.S. Dubey replaced S.N. Biswas as the chief secretary. On the same lines, the director general of police, K.A. Jacob was transferred and a hard taskmaster, T.P. Sinha was appointed.

There were more changes to come. The district magistrate of Patna, Rajbala Verma and senior superintendent of police, Sunil Kumar, were replaced by Amit Khare and Kumar Rajesh Chandra, res-

Bihar CM Rabri Devi with RJD president Laloo Yadav: playing favourites



pectively

Most of these new recruits had a proven track record of being extremely efficient in their area of work. V.S. Dubey had earned kudos for ordering a thorough inquiry after fraudulent withdrawals were detected at the Chaibasa district treasury. The probe ultimately led to the over-Rs 1500-crore fodder scam. Amit Khare, the then deputy commissioner of Chaibasa, had actually unearthed the scam on 20 January, 1996. Khare's posting as Patna district magistrate rattled the RJD national president Laloo Prasad Yadav. He accused the then Governor of playing a partisan role and removing officers belonging to the Scheduled Caste (read 'social justice' plank).

But when President's Rule was revoked on 9 March, after the motion could not be passed in the Rajya Sabha, it became a matter of certainty that the 'old order' of bureaucracy would be restored.

Not only were former chief secretary S.N. Biswas and director general of police, Jacob, brought in, home secretary Raj Kumar Singh, having survived the cudgel during the short spell of Presi-



Rajbala Verma: replaced Amit Khare as Patna district magistrate



dent's Rule, was axed on 25 April. It is believed that Singh had displeased inspector level officers vegetating in the state capital for the last decade or so. Singh, who had ordered the immediate transfer of such officers, did not realise that they had managed to stay in Patna simply because of their connections with the powers that be. Thus, Raj Kumar Singh had to go, making way for U.C. Panjiar.

At the district level, Amit Khare, the Patna district magistrate, too was ousted and, once again, replaced by Rajbala Verma. Although Verma has been blacklisted by the Election Commission and barred from conducting elections, she is a favourite of the RJD supremo, ever since the 1995 Assembly election. Which is not without reason, since she was charged with helping the RJD candidates (then Janata Dal) in Gaya, where she was posted as the district magistrate.

Sunil Kumar too is back where he belonged. "The Governor had removed an officer who is firmly of the social justice group and is a Chamar by caste," said Laloo, promptly reinstating him.

Overnight, Laloo managed to get key posts for his favourites, those belonging to his 'social justice' brigade, while others were either shunted or simply kept 'waiting for posting'

It comes as no surprise that while Laloo Prasad Yadav has made much noise and initiated the 'calling back' of officials belonging to his much-touted 'social justice' group, he has not, shown any interest in the case of Kamal Kishore, a young Christian IPS officer, who has been sitting idle at the police headquarters for a long time. Sources in the home department revealed that Kishore was away on medical leave for a while. But when he returned after recovery and reported for duty to his seniors, no post-

ing was found for him. All his batchmates have been promoted to the ranks of superintendent and are posted in various districts.

A former superintendent of police in Patna, Jagmohan, has been shunted to the Central Intelligence Department after he had an altercation with the RJD supremo himself during President's Rule. For M.S. Bhatia, who replaces him, the new job is indeed a come-down. Having served as district police chief for many years, he has been relegated to the post of a city SP — something normally offered to newly-appointed IPS officers.

All these transfers were conducted on the night of 29 April, after Sonia Gandhi decided to forego the idea of forming an alternate government and snap polls became a certainty. Laloo decided to act in haste and initiate the mass reshuffling in the dead of the night. Senior police officers, clerks — all those who would be involved to set the process in motion — were called from their homes for the purpose. Proposals were made, changed, finalised and sent to chief minister Rabri Devi, for her final approval. The whole thing was executed over the weekend, when the government offices would normally be closed.

Thus, within 75 hours after the dissolution of Parliament, 274 officers — 60 IAS officers, 38 IPS officials, 123 deputy SP rank officials, 32 sub-divisional officials and 21 deputy development commissioners — were shifted.

"Laloo knows that the RJD has no mass base, that is the reason why he is banking on a pliable bureaucracy," said Sushil Kumar Modi, the leader of Opposition in the state Assembly.

Interestingly, while the BJP restricted itself to just lodging a formal complaint with the Election Commission, the Samata Party general secretary, Lallan Kumar Singh, went ahead to file a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) petition in the High Court. The PIL states that, "These transfers were made without citing any grounds for the same." Singh has sought directives from the High Court for "annulment of the state government order" as it is fraught with "ulterior motives".

Now that the dates for a mid-term poll may be announced any moment, Laloo Yadav has tried his best to hold the fort. So what if it had to be done by pressing a 'pliable' bureaucracy into service! •

Naved Zahir/Patna

A raw deal

Prime Minister Vajpayee was let down by both the BJP and its allies.



Truth often hurts. It evokes angry, senseless retorts. Take, for instance, Harish Khare's well-argued piece *Vajpayee Deserves Better in The Hindu*.

He was only stating the obvious when he discussed how Prime Minister Vajpayee was let down by members of his own party and some of his allies while heading a shaky coalition government. These men and women would not leave the Prime Minister alone to his graceful impulses. "Within minutes of Mr Vajpayee submitting his resignation, the Union home minister, Mr L.K. Advani, was revealing rather gracelessly to the journalists and cameramen what had transpired between the President and the defeated Prime Minister. The Head of the Republic was more or less pressurised right in the forecourt of the Rashtrapati Bhavan, by Mr Advani; all that Mr Vajpayee could do was to observe dignified silence."

Khare, in his article, came down strongly on some of the BJP allies, particularly the George Fernandes circus, the Samata Party. He suggested that a merger with the BJP would instil some kind of discipline in the Samata Party. Khare was only telling the truth when he pointed out that Fernandes was a major embarrassment to the ruling coalition. "Mr Vajpayee paid a very heavy price because he let Mr George Fernandes run amuck as the defence minister and never asserted his prime ministerial authority to discipline the Samata Party leader." He also traced the antecedents of the party which was created only because Fernandes was unable to work with his former patron, Laloo Prasad Yadav. Wrote Khare, "It is about time Mr Fernandes learnt the discipline and enjoyed the synergy of a larger organisation."

The attack must have hurt. Pat came the reply from Fernandes' 'Girl Friday' and the general secretary of the Samata Party—Jaya Jaitley who made a misera-

Within minutes of Mr Vajpayee submitting his resignation, the Union home minister, Mr L.K. Advani, was revealing rather gracelessly to the journalists and cameramen what had transpired between the President and the defeated Prime Minister



A.B. Vajpayee: down and out

ble attempt to project the Samata circus as a 'state party'. The most amusing part of the reply was the statement, "The Samata Party has never compromised on its secular image, but refuses to be drawn into the jargon of political secularism." We had heard of pseudo-secularism, but what the heck is 'political secularism'? I am sure it did not consist of the political and secular wisdom of the likes of Fernandes, who after spending less than one hour in the region where Dr Staines was burnt to death, gave a 'clean chit' to the Bajrang Dal

and its associates.

By the way, *The Hindu* has a new look. The layout is more pleasing and easy on the eye, but why doesn't it publish more interesting and effective photographs on its page one? Unfortunately, the new look also permits too many ads in the Friday cultural pages and the Saturday sports special. But another asset to the paper is the Sunday magazine, which offers a wonderful variety (some of it a bit heavy, I admit) to the readers. Recently, the magazine published one of the best interviews I had ever

come across, that of Salman Rushdie by Ms Nirmala Lakshman. It had everything—the writer's philosophy, approach to writing, association with Bombay, and of course, some revealing comments on his recent best-seller, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*.

But then you cannot satisfy every reader. T. Krishnamoorthy from Coimbatore, a *Hindu* reader for over 40 years, in a letter to the editor suggested that the paper should come out of its "shackles of your sympathy for communists. I have been observing with pain, the qualitative degeneration your newspaper had undergone in the recent past with its consistently biased political reporting and articles against a major political party and the persistent, if subtle, effort to prop up parties that have been proclaiming defunct theories and extinct philosophies and indulging in disruptive politics." Was Mr Krishnamoorthy against the positive and sometimes aggressive secular editorial policy of *The Hindu* which makes every Indian proud?

Poor President!

Most of us agree that in Mr K.R. Narayanan we have an honest and upright President who carefully studies the ticklish issues before him and strictly goes according to the Constitution. But then, it is hard to please everyone, particularly the communal fringe in the country. One of the BJP stalwarts, Dr Murli Manohar Joshi, embarrassed everyone including his own Prime Minister by his strident criticism of the President. Unfortunately, some sections of the media followed this trend. One poison-spewing political correspondent of the *Free Press Journal* who acts as an official spokesman of the BJP, argued that the recent political crisis dented the President's image for fair play. Well, the President was well within his rights in asking the Vajpayee government to prove its majority in the House. The time he gave to Ms Sonia Gandhi to try and form an alternative government did not lead to any political horse-trading.

Chandan Mitra of *The Pioneer*, in a front-page editorial, urged the President to be 'transparent'. What was the President doing then? Unfortunately, *The Pioneer*, an excellent newspaper once, is now reduced to carrying prominently photographs of a smirking George Fernandes, carrying a placard full of anti-



Sonia Gandhi slogans. If, as urged by Fernandes, Sonia Gandhi went back to Italy, India would heave a sigh of relief, George should join his fighting friends of the LTTE in the hills of Sri Lanka. Isn't that the right place for a 'fighting socialist revolutionary' despite the fact he had changed dozens of political parties so that he could be with a ruling combination and be rewarded with a ministership?

But then, Fernandes is now a contender for Prime Ministership. According to Pamela Philipose (*Indian Express*), he is fully qualified for the job. Wrote Ms Philipose in the *Sunday Indian Express*, "Fernandes would like to be PM because he believes that now that he can sink a chief of naval staff and a nation-



George Fernandes: playing dirty politics

Most of us agree that in K.R. Narayanan we have an honest and upright President who carefully studies the ticklish issues before him and strictly goes according to the Constitution. But then, it is hard to please everyone, particularly the communal fringe in the country

nal government single-handed, it's only right that he be given a chance to sink the country, single-handed." So the LTTE will have to wait.

Hard times

Magna publication's *Showtime*, though forced to play second fiddle to *Stardust*, the flagship of the company, occasionally comes out with good stuff. The May issue of *Showtime* had an excellent piece on the present and future of Amitabh Bachchan and analysed his mistakes and choice of films which had almost made him a 'No No' in Bollywood. *Lal Badshah* finally had tipped the scales against Bachchan. Quoting producer-director Prakash Mehta, Manoj Desai, chief of the (now defunct) Amitabh Bachchan Fan Club and friendly director Tinnu Anand, the piece argued the actor can no longer romp around in romantic roles chasing a Manisha Koirala or a Raveena Tandon and should consider serious mature roles.

The piece also highlighted the glaring failure of the ABCL Corporation and the reasons behind it. There is no move to denigrate Bachchan, but the piece pulled no punches on the lack of judgement—by the 'Big B'. Tinnu Anand defends the actor, but no one can argue against the true, but harsh judgement of Prakash Mehta, "Today, Amit is in a very common race, where he is just Amitabh. He was once in ten at one time. He was once a super-star. Today he is just an actor." I hope Amitabh Bachchan reads the piece. It should make him think.

No Holds Barred

Amita Malik's autobiography is witty and charming

This book should have been called Vinegar and Pepper. It is the life story of one of India's most formidable media columnists and TV journalists, Amita Malik.

Malik, indisputably the grande dame of television and cinema writing, made broadcasting and telecasting her career in an era when journalism was not considered a suitable job for a woman and the TV industry was still in its infancy. She broke barriers easily, both because of her charm and her acerbic wit (her colleagues say everyone was frightened of her and she was frightened of nobody!)

Amita Malik's irreverence glitters through in this extract from 'Amita: No holds Barred'

This is about her encounters with Khushwant Singh, who could be every bit as outspoken as she was.

My smooth and cheery entry into the world of journalism was entirely due to the unique character and personality of Jim Cowley. I think he had guessed where my main interests lay: "You have been in broadcasting and you can write. Why don't you give me a weekly critique on radio programmes?" he asked. And so he commissioned my first column ever and I think the first media column in India. Cowley gave it the title Listening Post and the pseudonym Vigilante (wrongly

pronounced by readers as Vij-lantey ever after).

There seems to have been something about my radio and TV columns which brought out both the best and the worst in editors, as well as broadcasters and telecasters, even if they were lapped up by readers. They were provocative and outspoken, but always documented and meant to make listeners and viewers think and, if necessary, protest. But they caused such a commotion in the home and in our careers, both Iqbal's and mine — that my field hazards in the area of film criticism, which were considerable, almost pale in comparison.

When I returned triumphant from *The Statesman* and told Iqbal, who was



AMITA MALIK



ALL INDIA RADIO, DELHI

then a programme executive in AIR, about my exciting new assignment, he was horrified: "But you know what government is like and what AIR is like. They are sure to persecute me." Ever the individualist, I argued, "But you won't help me, I will never discuss it with you, I got the assignment independently, without your knowledge. Besides, I am out of AIR."

You'll see, said Iqbal gloomily, and he was proved right. The then director-general, a man called Bhatt, immediately set his sniffer dogs on *The Statesman* as soon as he read my first column, which was considered heresy. It was described as criticism of the government and against departmental rules, since I was the wife of a government official. I had already sworn James Cowley and Evan Charlton, his deputy who edited my column, to secrecy. And they kept my identity a top secret. Even the younger fry in *The Statesman*, the subs and the reporters refused to be cajoled by Bhatt's spies. So the AIR bosses decided to act anyway on their hunch and took drastic action against Iqbal. He was transferr-

ed almost overnight to Bombay.

We had just got married and it was very hard. However, I had my new job with The British Information Services (BIS), in the UK High Commission in Delhi, where our friend and ally Jack Hughes then counsellor for information and press, had given me a slot after I left AIR. "Don't worry," said Jack soothingly, "We'll find something for you in Bombay." And he did. Within six months, he gave me a job as librarian at the British Information Services in Bombay. "But I know nothing about librarianship," I said diffidently. "There are just a few books, we shall give you a small booklet called Keesing Archives, it won't be very difficult really. Your main job will be to answer questions about Britain," they assured me. And I think I met more interesting people in my first few months at the job than I might have if I hadn't sat at that front desk. Besides, the Botawala Chambers on Pheroza Shah Mehta Road, where the office was located, overlooked a noisy and smelly fish market. It cheered my Bengali heart as I picked up fresh fish after office.

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There were two officers in charge at the BIS. David Brower, who later joined Visnews and R. Mac. C. Samples, more familiarly known as Mac, who was Information Officer for Economic Affairs. Mac and his lovely wife Elsie, who suffered a tragic attack of polio in Bombay, were our true godparents. As a result, Iqbal and I survived. Mac and

Elsie had an amazing range of friends, from Bombay's social elite to its leading academics, artists, musicians, journalists, both up-and-coming and famous. They later went to Canada where Mac was posted in Toronto.

Listening Post also survived, gloriously. Because it had not struck Mr Bhatt and his watchdogs that I could also listen to the radio in Bombay and Listening Post could quite easily be fil-

Khushwant Singh described me as 'Amita Malik, who never has a kind word for anyone'. Well Khushwant will be Khushwant



KHUSHWANT SINGH

ed from there, the Indian post office being much more quick and efficient in those days. So Iqbal's transfer to Bombay did not really kill it and Listening Post ran very successfully for four years. My link with Listening Post came to a natural end when Iqbal was sent to the BBC in London for a staff training course and I followed a month later and stayed on for almost a year. Not that it helped. Anyone who got a bashing in the column thereafter blamed it on me. Notably Khushwant Singh.

Khushwant had called me soon after he returned from London where

he had been posted as Press Counsellor in the Indian High Commission. He joined as Producer-Announcer in All India Radio, heaven knows why, and he himself joked about it saying: "I neither produce nor announce." In fact, his main contribution to AIR was that he had a bunch of roses kept on the office table of Mehra Masani, then director of external services, every morning. And I must confess that she fully deserved them, both for professionalism and charm. She was quite splendid and all of us would have put roses on her table every morning if we could have afforded it.

One day I received a note from Khushwant: "Dear Amita, you and I are the only natives who have written for *The New Statesman*. Would you and that handsome husband of yours have dinner with us on..?" Well, the dinner was most pleasant. The company was stimulating, the food Punjabi at its very best, the Scotch whisky and wine were generous. And as at all such subsequent dinners, his father and mother joined us for a little while and the very introduction, "My parents, Sir Sobha and Lady Singh" was enough to make every dinner feel privileged. The bonhomie went on for quite some time until that fateful Christmas party at the Holroydes, my old friends from London, who were now in Delhi, Derek as BBC representative. As usual, there were dumb charades as part of the Christmas games and Khushwant and I were in the same team. To my amazement, instead of his usual hearty greeting, he cut me dead. Next morning I rang him up: "Hullo Khushwant, did you cut me dead last night?"

"Well, after what you wrote about my feature in Listening Post, did you expect me to kiss your hand? You said I had produced a lousy programme, he replied.

"Actually, I think you did," I said, "But I didn't write the column and if you want to check, why don't you ring up Evan Charlton?" He did. And from what I gathered from Evan, he had replied. "I can say that Amy didn't write it, but I won't tell you who did."

Nevertheless, Khushwant's sulks continued. And they increased when the then editor of the *Illustrated Weekly of India*, A.S. Raman, played a very dirty trick on several columnists, all well-known to each other in Delhi. One day he rang me up from Bombay and asked if I could do the Delhi Letter for him. "But my friend Khushwant Singh is already doing it and I wouldn't like to take away his assignment," I protested.

"I have spoken to Khushwant, he doesn't want to continue," said the editor, quite untruthfully as I later found out, to my own cost. Because after some time, he wrote to me and asked if I would do a write-up on Yamini Krishnamurthy, one of India's leading classical dancers. "I can't," I replied, "I am not an expert on Bharatanatyam." Nevertheless, he sent me two more written reminders and I simply ignor-

ed them. Then one fine morning, I opened the *Illustrated Weekly* to find I had been replaced by my friend and colleague Chanchal Sarkar, without a word to me. The last column I had sent in had simply not been used. On checking with Chanchal, I found it was the same old story. He had also been told that I was no longer interested in writing the column.

To continue with Khushwant. Soon after, we were both invited to meet a Czech poet at a Czech diplomat's residence over cocktails. Unfortunately for Khushwant, he did not have a car that day, so it was natural for our Czech host to ask at the end of the party if I would mind dropping Khushwant Singh wherever he wanted. "I'd be delighted," I said. Khushwant stiffened and then unbent. "Drop me at the nearest taxi stand," he growled and then sat beside me in dead silence. I passed several taxi stands and then stopped in front of his building in Sujjan Singh Park where I had spent many delightful evenings. "I say, I have been pretty bloody-minded with you, haven't I?" said Khushwant impulsively.

"Yes you have and I have often wondered why," I replied.

"It is because you write better than me," confessed a perhaps slightly inebriated Khushwant Singh.

"Don't be silly, Khushwant," I replied "Even if that were true, look at where you are, at the top. You have written books. You are India's most widely-read columnist, you can get



BBC OFFICE IN LONDON

My link with Listening Post came to a natural end when Iqbal was sent to the BBC in London for a staff training course and I followed a month later and stayed on for almost a year. Not that it helped. Anyone who got a bashing in the column thereafter blamed it on me

About the only person who has had the last word on Khushwant was the brilliant young journalist, Dhiren Bhagat, who wrote Khushwant's 'obituary' in advance in the same unkind and cruel terms that Khushwant had himself employed to write about some very decent people...

any job you want, you can travel anywhere you like on lavish invitations. You have loads of money, you will inherit a fortune. What more do you want?"

"Will you have lunch with me tomorrow. I'll ring you up," said Khushwant with his former warmth. "Delighted," I replied. And that was the last I heard of it.

But he soon started sniping at me, completely without provocation, from time to time in his columns. He quite often referred to me as a liar. But one particular attack was the most inexplicable. I had rung him up to say a young Indian woman had made a most powerful protest documentary against the



DHIREN BHAGAT

proposed ballistic missile testing range at Balaipal, in Orissa. Patwant Singh was having a showing in his house and would he please come and see it? Perhaps he could lend his powerful pen in support, if he thought the film deserved it. Sure enough, Khushwant came with his wife Kanwal, had his routine Scotches, saw the film and then wrote a few kind lines about it in his column. But not about me. In this completely unlikely context, he described me as 'Amita Malik, who never

has a kind word for anyone.' Well Khushwant will be Khushwant. About the only person who has had the last word on Khushwant was the brilliant young journalist, Dhiren Bhagat, who wrote Khushwant's 'obituary' in advance in the same unkind and cruel terms that Khushwant had himself employed to write about some very decent people, even making fun, literally, of their physical warts after they were dead. I suppose some will say that Khushwant had the last word, after all. Because Dhiren Bhagat was killed soon after in a tragic car accident.

Once, when I criticised a documentary film made by a friend of his, Khushwant wrote a letter to *The Statesman* beginning: "All film critics are bad, but yours is the worst." Some time after, when I met him at a party, I asked why he had liked the film and where he disagreed with me. "I haven't seen the film," he confessed with his usual disarming honesty. "The fellow just brought me the letter and I signed it."

But I'll say this for Khushwant. He can take a joke and even make them against himself. In an article on Indian writers he wrote, "For the many years that I was press and cultural officer in the High Commission in London I had to take a hand in organising publicity for visiting artistes. It was not (nor is it now) very difficult to get round critics through generous dispensations of Scotch whisky and have them write favourable notices." When I myself asked him, early on in his career and in our friendship, the secret of his success as an author, he said with a hearty

YAMINI KRISHNAMURTHY



laugh: "When I was the press attache in London, my government salary was hardly enough to support myself. But I used my family money and diplomatic position to dine all the leading newspapers, from the *Times* to the *Guardian*. That's how I got all those rave reviews. It's quite easy really." Only Khushwant could have said that, and he remains one of the most lovable and uninhibited of human beings. •

Amita: No Holds Barred, Published by HarperCollins India; Price: Rs 295

DILIP BANERJEE



SCAM LAND: file picture of a coal mine in Bihar

BIHAR

Black money

Another scam is unearthed in the state. This one involves coal mining

Once again, Bihar has managed to grab the lime-light — for wrong reasons though. After the much-written-about fodder scam, the Bitumen scam, the education scam and the medicine scam — each one way below the Rs 1,500 crore mark — the state has finally hit the goldmine of all scams. The only difference is that instead of gold, the scam involves coalmines.

A carefully orchestrated loot has been detected in the Project Development India Limited and the Bharat Coking Coal Limited (BCCL), a subsidiary of the Coal India Limited (CIL). Running into an estimated Rs 12,000 crores or even more, the loot has been going for the past 15 years and still awaits a formal CBI probe.

Bringing the matter to light, Marxist Coordination Commit-

tee legislator Gurudas Chatterjee has threatened to resign by 30 April, if the state failed to send the recommendation for a CBI probe to the Union government.

Chatterjee is not the only one to point out the scam. In the past, several members of Parliament cutting across party lines had written to previous Prime Ministers, drawing their attention to the problem. But nothing has happened so far. Prime Ministers have come and gone, but the Union government has so far maintained a studied silence over the matter.

On one hand, the government says that BCCL is losing in crores. But "confidential files" of CIL reveal that a loot is going on. But there seems to be no one who can find out whether the loss is due to bad management or siphoning of funds.

Spearheading the crusade against corruption, Chatterjee has again written to Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on

16 March. In his letter, Chatterjee has disclosed that the loot amount has touched almost the Rs 1,000 crore mark. And much of it has taken place while purchasing BCCL's machinery and spare parts over the past 15 years.

According to Chatterjee, his hunch was confirmed by the Inquiry Committee which initially looked into the matter at the behest of the Union government. The "report" was later submitted to the BCCL executive director (vigilance). The matter did not end here. Sometime after he received the report, the ED (vigilance) lodged an FIR at the Saraidhela police station, stating that the "report" was stolen! Ramashray Singh, another crusader working against the loot, further disclosed that over 200 employees of the BCCL were involved in the scam.

Money was siphoned off from the BCCL in a rather simple manner. Private companies purchased superior quality coal and paid the rate meant for inferior quality. There were inconsistency in weight also. Ironically, the government, which was too keen to shut down PSUs, did not take the initiative to check these discrepancies. Chatterjee revealed that along with BCCL, the Central Coalfields Limited (CCL), having its headquarters at Ranchi in south Bihar and the Eastern Coalfields Limited (ECL) with its headquarters at Sanktodia in West Bengal, have shown losses to the tune of crores. At the same time, five other units of CIL, headquartered in Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Orissa, have registered huge profits.

In recent times, the central government has presented a report in the Parliament session for the year 1998-99. The report stated that for the year 1996-97 and 1997-98, the BCCL made a loss of Rs 463.72 crore. Matters with the BCCL reached such a pass that it was handed over to the BIFR. Till date, even after three-and-a-half years, the company continues to be under the BIFR's vigil.

According to the report of the central government, between 1992-93 and 1994-95, of the 89 operative mines after nationalisation, target was nearly achieved in 16. But in 1995-96, only 278.1 lakh tonnes were mined against a target of 307.50 lakh tonnes. This continued for quite some time. As a result, the gap between demand and supply kept going up.

And when matters saw the light of the day, a shortage of 75.4 lakh tonnes was detected, the value of which stood at Rs 233.80 crores. The shortage had been built up since 1983-84 and was detected in 1993. It was found that lakhs of tonnes of coal was never supplied. But still, the scam was dressed up under the guise of "stock adjustment". On the other hand, the BCCL continued to show an "increase" in its coal production.

In fact, the R.N. Mishra Committee set up by the Union government pointed out that while the coal supply was reduced to a trickle, "over-reported production" continued. The committee also found out that while in 1983-84, the production was valued at Rs 25 crore, in 1993-94 "over-reported production" was at Rs 200 crore. With these things coming to light, Chatterjee has also threatened that if the state and the Union government fail to take any action, he will be compelled to move court.

With general elections lurking round the corner, it remains to be seen what recourse Chatterjee can take. He has already tendered his resignation, saying that it will be deemed effective from 30 April if the state government fails to take any action. •

Naved Zahir/Patna

MADHYA PRADESH

Modern times

Technology and commerce ruin one of India's richest fishing grounds

It's a classic case of what improved technology and commerce can do to nature and indigenous peoples. In the heart of Bastar, Madhya Pradesh, the Raja Murias and Bisonhorn Marias — tribal communities living on both sides of the Indravati river — had thrived for centuries on fish and forests. But of late, the fish is beginning to disappear as have the forests.

The Indravati river, on which a major multipurpose dam was once planned but had to be eventually shelved because of snowballing popular resentment, forms a spectacular falls at Chitrakoot, about 35 km from the former princely town of Jagdalpur, now the headquarters of Bastar district. The river at Chitrakoot was not only famous for its mythological links with the Ramayana but also for its varied fish stock, considered to be one of the richest in Indian river systems. But in the last two decades, Chitrakoot's great shoals of fish have gone, leaving behind only a legend for the tribals to live by.

Chitrakoot's decline as a major fishing ground began with the coming of Bengali settlers and their improved fishing nets. The Bengalis had arrived as refugees, first in the post-Partition era and, then, in the aftermath of the Bangladesh War in 1971. They were rehabilitated in the huge forest tract of Dandakaranya, straddling the states of Orissa and Madhya

A piece of history

The Eastern Railway holds a unique exhibition of postage stamps inside Howrah Station

In Calcutta, the 44th railway week was recently celebrated in a unique manner. To mark the occasion, an exhibition of old and new postage stamps was organised inside Howrah Station. Inaugurated on 16 April by S.K. Das, postmaster-general, West Bengal circle, the exhibition of stamps, issued mostly on railways, brought out India's transition into the modern age.

But the novel feature of the exhibition was that the entire collection was built up — stamp by stamp — by the well-known philatelist Mohammed Mujibullah, who is also an employee at the computer section of Eastern Railway's Howrah division. These beauties were on display for a week between 11 am and 6 pm and entry to the exhibition was free.

The exhibition featured around 1,200 stamps. The oldest one dated back to 1852 and the newest one was of 1997. Each piece of paper had a story associated with it.

And Mujibullah himself is a living database of philate-

Pradesh. And Chitrakoot was one area the refugees adopted as their new home.

The settlers were expert fishers, coming as they did from a land laced with rivers, lakes and swamps. And the fine nets they brought with them revolutionised fishing on the once-wooded banks of the Indravati.

"We had never seen such nets before," said Madhusudan Kashyap, showing a fish he had managed to catch after spending an entire day in the river. "They helped us to scoop up several kgs within a few hours." But the good times came to an end faster than anyone had anticipated. The nets that hauled up tons of fish also caused a swift depletion of stocks.

Earlier, the Raja Murias would depend on the hook and line and traditional bamboo contraptions, catch only what they needed for their own consumption, and were happy with a subsistence economy that had sustained them for generations. But with the coming of fishing nets, improved transport and evergrowing market demands, commercial fishing became the order of the day.

By the middle of the Eighties, the Indravati at Chitrakoot was betraying signs of over-fishing. And in a desperate attempt to increase the catch, tribal and non-tribal fishermen introduced the most lethal device: explosives. Depth-charges would now be frequently used, causing an immediate flush in supplies but ruining all chances of replenishment.

"Today we often have to spend the whole day to get even a kilo of fish," laments Surku, a Raja Muria fisherman. And whatever he catches, he sells to merchants in Jagdalpur at a price much lower than the retail rate. With the money they make from fish, which is around Rs 30/kg for all varieties, they buy other essentials. But fish, which seldom sells below Rs 40/kg in the market, has virtually gone out of the tribals' reach.



RARE FARE: a tribal showing off his catch

"There was a time when we would fete our guests with the finest fish," recalled Madhusudan. "That was our custom. Today we feel embarrassed when guests come because we can't offer them fish."

The tribals rue the fact that alien systems have wrecked their lifestyles and non-tribal values are being imposed on their culture. Some say that the place was originally known as Chitalkot, meaning the land of the Chital, a from of deer that was once found in abundance in the region. The name 'Chitrakoot', they imagine, is a latter-day imposition intended to shut out the area's tribal history and recast it in a Hindu mould.

The forests have already thinned, the Chital deer is nowhere to be seen, and the famous fish of Chitrakoot are now becoming rarer. And in each case, the tribals are the real losers. •

Anish Gupta with M.A. Iqbal/Chitrakoot

ly. Ask him and he will tell you that India's first stamp was printed under the supervision of the then postmaster-general Sir Bartle Freres and was issued in 1852. The paper on which it was printed was found to be so brittle that the stamp had to be reprinted shortly after it appeared for the first time. The new stamps were to be embossed on

TELLING A TALE: stamps on display



white or bluish paper of varying thickness.

But this idea also had to be dropped because the papers could not be easily distinguished. So an order was placed with Messers Dela Rue and Company in England to emboss the stamps on blue paper. A slight change of design was also incorporated. But the then Government of India decided to call in the entire consignment which was eventually destroyed. The only known survivor of these stamps is now with Mujibullah.

Stamps became Mujibullah's passion when he was a young boy. Initially, he collected almost everything. Only later, did he start specialising and even decided to collect stamps on railways — not only Indian but also stamps on railways of other countries.

And it went on for years, for nearly three decades. Mujibullah's collection now has nearly 15,000 stamps. Out of these, around 1,200 were chosen for the railway-week exhibition. "The general manager and the postmaster-general helped me a lot to set up the display. Without their help this would not have been possible," said a beaming Mujibullah.

And how much is his collection worth now? According to the postmaster-general, West Bengal circle, the 1852 stamp will be around Rs 15 lakhs. And Mujibullah's entire collection will be worth around Rs 40 lakhs.

To the philatelist, however, these are parts of his family. •

Pradip Sanyal/Calcutta

Role model

TV producers are making a beeline for pretty faces

Can models act? This vexatious question pops up each time the next, new, hot discovery from the ramp is catapulted on to the screen. For a long time, it was something that only movie moghuls with a weakness for pretty faces dealt with. Now TV producers have to indulge in the same exercise.

Sony's new serial *Khwaish* (Tuesdays, 8.30 pm) not only is set around the modelling world, it has real-life models as lead players, and three episodes down, they seem to be holding their own amongst the others. It helps, of course, that the co-stars aren't exactly your seasoned types and the fact that your average model isn't meant to be deep.

What they're meant to be is beautiful and brittle, and between Annie Thomas and Mini Mathur and their kind, they divvy up those attributes nicely. What *Khwaish* also has is the semblance of a story which tracks the path of the young



TRP BOOSTER: Pamela Anderson in *Baywatch*

people who get attracted to the world of glamour, and how they achieve success, and at what cost.

If it pans out well, the serial should be like a good morality play reflecting the prevalent trend among both urban and semi-urban youth which seems to rank modelling as the most attractive career choice. Especially after the *Sush/Ash* combine swept the world of beauty pageants and landed itself lucrative advertising contracts and plum movie roles.

Of course, if you are Pamela Anderson, then the ability to act, or the lack thereof becomes academic. Even if the lady didn't have an ounce of talent, it wouldn't matter because it is the ounces of silicone which keep the ratings of *Baywatch* bouncing. Word has it, though, that she's gone in for a drastic reduction, among other things, in her being able to sleep on her stomach. •

TRIPURA

The heat is on

Lack of rainfall brings starvation and death to the tribal areas

The threat of famine looms large over Tripura as it gets ravaged by an unprecedented drought-like situation due to scanty rainfall. On 19 April, three members of a tribal family at Wakhiraipara — a tribal hamlet in West Tripura district — took their own lives when they could not cope with hunger.

Rabindra Debbarma, general secretary of Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti (TUJS) and an Opposition MLA who toured the areas under the grip of food shortage, said that the tribals — Nripendra Debbarma, his wife Mayabati and their only son Kutchung were starving for nearly a week. Their desperation was reinforced by lack of work. The twin problems of lack of food and work seem to have gripped the entire hilly and interior tribal areas in the state.

According to Rabindra Debbarma, Nripen had asked for food from villagers at Wakhiraipara but they had nothing to spare. Next day, his neighbours broke open his house to find that he along with his wife and teenaged son were hanging from the ceiling.

Rabindra Debbarma pointed out that while this was only one incident which had come to light, at least 41 people had already died of starvation in Tripura. Debbarma, who is the former state cooperative minister, warned that the situation would worsen unless the government doubled the ration in starvation-hit areas and also arranged for the supply of drinking water and medicines.

Revenue minister Keshab Majumder, however, denied the incidents of starvation deaths. But he admitted that gastroenteritis and other waterborne diseases had assumed epidemic proportions. At least 21 people had died only in Chhamanu block in Dhalai district due to gastroenteritis which was the area visited by Majumdar who is also the health minister of Tripura. Reports, however, put the figure at 50. The health minister has directed the director of health to rush medical teams.

According to state agriculture minister Aghore Debbarma, boro crops on 25,000 hectares of land have been completely damaged and more than 55,000 peasant families have been affected due to the drought. He said the rainfall had abruptly stopped. "Compared to 155 mm which the state had witnessed last year, this year it has been 57 mm only. To make matters worse, water sources like ponds, pools, rivers and streams have dried up, affecting irrigation. To come to terms with the situation, we have decided to ask for a grant of Rs 50 crore from the Centre."

At a high level meeting, chief minister Manik Sarkar reviewed the drought situation. After the meeting, several ministers along with chief secretary V. Thulasi Das and other bureaucrats appealed to government employees to extend help to the drought-affected families irrespective of political affiliation.

A team of Opposition leaders has visited the affected areas and has urged the government to supply double ration to the affected areas free of cost to save the lives of the people. •

Kuntala Chakraborty/Agartala



SUNDAY WEEK

KUSUM BHANDARI

BEGINNING 9 MAY, 1999

ARIES

(21 March-20 April)

It is better to preserve the status quo than to attempt to introduce major changes. You may be stirring up a hornet's nest if you insist on going ahead with basic alterations. People are likely to be in a conservative and even entrenched mood. This is a time when relationships can be severed.

TAURUS

(21 April-20 May)

Where colleagues or fellow workers make a hopeless mess of their undertakings, you can quietly and unobtrusively put things back on the right road. Ridiculing others will not encourage them to greater efficiency or understanding. Be more lenient and considerate.

GEMINI

(21 May-20 June)

You will be happy to be on the move. This is no time to seek the comfort and security of the home. It is a particularly good time to make a tour of the shops and stores. This would also be a good time for shopping around for news and information. Keep your ear to the ground for useful hints and tips.

CANCER

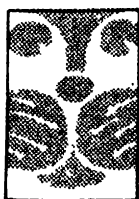
(21 June-20 July)

Family members can give greater assistance than you thought possible. Connections they have forged with influential people may now be placed at your disposal. Such contacts might give you a way out of a financial tight corner. It will be wise to discuss economic matters with close relations.

LEO

(21 July-20 August)

Do not sink in depths of despair, thereby accomplishing nothing. It is advisable to bring current artistic and creative ventures to a close, before your imaginative well runs dry. Even fame and acclaim can come to you. You may meet people now who are able to put you in the know.



LIBRA

(21 September-20 October)

You cannot afford to take risks with your own health or physical safety. You are apt to get too much wound up now. Simplify your schedule. Attempts to get too much done can be counter-productive. You will only wear yourself down to the frazzle. Don't allow yourself to get all worked up.



SAGITTARIUS

(21 November-20 December)

The week gets off to a lively start. Excellent headway can be made with routine business and occupational affairs. Do all you can to give personal financial resources a boost. This is likely to be achieved by attending to minor rather than major matters. Do not overlook details.

CAPRICORN

(21 December-20 January)

You are apt to view the world through the lens of over-optimism. It can be disastrous to take too much for granted. Do not assume that others will see things in the same way as yourself. Where you see a clear road, others are likely to see the way strewn with boulders and obstacles.

AQUARIUS

(21 January-20 February)

It will not be advisable to give loved ones a hard time. They may be closer to the breaking point than you realise. You should rather be attempting to reduce the burdens and strains that are weighing so heavily on your nearest and dearest. Conditions are favourable for buying and selling of homes.

PISCES

(21 February-20 March)

Your attention will probably be wandering to subjects and activities not remotely related to business or occupational affairs. But if the wolves are to be kept from the door, you have no choice but to get on with the job. Give yourself more time to get on with fresh propositions. •

SCORPIO

(21 October-20 November)

This is not a time for half measures in property or financial affairs. You will have to act decisively where problems in these areas pose a serious threat. People in authority are likely to back any far-reaching moves you make to remedy awkward situations.

VIRGO

(21 August-20 September)

Your enthusiasm for new business ventures is not likely to be matched by officials or by people who have the final say. It could be that you are building your own house on sand where commercial plans are concerned. You will only be undermining any authority you have by misusing it.

Picture of confidence

■ The meeting of the Confederation of Indian Industry was an eye-opener for more reasons than one. The Prime Minister got a standing ovation, the first PM ever to get such a rousing reception at an annual CII meeting. Industrialists were bowled over by the PM's sense of authority and confidence.

This clearly rubbed off on the finance minister. Yashwant Sinha walked into the



Yashwant Sinha: "I'll be back"

meeting and announced that it was business as usual. "This is just a brief interruption. What is the phrase Doordarshan has for it? 'Rukavat ke liye khed hai?' Well, I just want to tell you that I'll be back. We'll all be back," said Sinha exuding confidence.

If only confidence alone could win elections!

Going places

■ The jockeying has started. The posts of executive director of the IMF and World Bank are coming up and the govern-

HEARD AT THE CHAMBERS

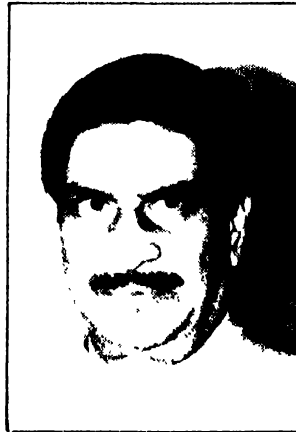
The battle for MPs was intercontinental versus Hyatt.

A BUSINESSMAN ON THE TWO POLITICAL HOTELS: INTERCONTINENTAL (CONGRESS) AND HYATT (BJP)

ment has to decide who it wants to appoint. These are plum posts but even more so now when India is facing sanctions because of the nuclear tests.

Former Cabinet secretary Surendra Singh and former secretary in the ministry of finance, M.K. Sivaraman, have done a magnificent job in defending India's position in the Fund-Bank set-up. Assuming that they are not given a second term, those who replace them will have their jobs cut out for them.

One of the names being



Prabhat Kumar: prize posting

CHECK-LIST

The Asian Development Bank's prescription for India

■ **Speed up reforms:** India must accelerate the rate of reforms and widen their scope.

■ **Develop infrastructure:** Fiscal consolidation, infrastructure development and reform of financial and capital markets are essential.

■ **Bridge the gap:** There is a widening balance of payments gap and fiscal pressure on the economy.

■ **Ease pressure on prices:** Imbalances on the external account must be relieved so that domestic prices are not under pressure.

■ **Check imports:** An improved fiscal performance could ease the pressure on the balance of payments. But if imports continued to rise unchecked, India could be open to external vulnerabilities.

■ **Encourage private investment:** Investment in power, road and transport sectors had failed to keep pace with demand. There must be greater private sector investment in these sectors.

considered for the World Bank is that of Cabinet secretary Prabhat Kumar. Although he has a substantial part of his tenure left, he may be tempted to take this job up. For executive directorship of the IMF, the government is considering appointing P. Subramaniam, chief secretary of Maharashtra, who is having a running feud with crusader-bureaucrat Arun Bhatia.

The appointments are likely to be made soon, so that the BJP can demonstrate that it isn't just a caretaker government.

Cooler pastures

■ Having played his part in the BJP government's fall, former adviser to the finance ministry, Mohan Guruswamy, has now removed himself to



Mohan Guruswamy: biding time

the cooler climes of the USA. He has managed to get a visiting professorship at Harvard University for three months.

And if all goes well, by the time he returns, another government will be in place, no doubt to restore the job which was so rudely taken away from him earlier this year.

It isn't for nothing that West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu says the destabilisation of India was a foreign-funded plot. •

Fear of the ballot

■ Ah! The price one has to pay for popularity.

The 'vote of confidence' was over and Parliament dissolved. But some indefatigable MPs thought there was still hope. If they offered their support to the BJP government, may be the government could be revived and an election avoided.

So even as the Cabinet was meeting to recommend to the President of India that he dissolve Parliament and hold early elections to the Lok Sabha, PA's to various ministers got calls on their cellphone: all offering support to the BJP government. The common refrain was: Please, do anything but avoid an election!

Too late, boss, said one PA to an MP of the Republican Party of India (RPI) who called to say that the BJP could have his vote, but no election. The house is dissolved. Next time.

Rising son?

■ For those who didn't spot the dashing, dapper Priya Ranjan Das Munshi in the Central Hall or the lobbies during the whole length of the political crisis, here is news. Priya has neither gone underground nor become disillusioned with politics. It's just that the week the BJP government fell, he was busy celebrating the birth of his first child, a son.

This is an event of sorts for West Bengal Congress MP A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury. S.S. Ray, Singara Roy and Subroto Mukherjee have no children. Sohan Mune and Abdul Kalam are single. Prakash Chandra and Ashok Kumar are not as fortunate.

HEARD IN NEW DELHI

The Congress party has two presidents: one has an office on 24 Akbar Road and the other in Rashtrapati Bhavan.

A BJP SUPPORTER



Das Munshi: a proud father

ELECTION TRIVIA

The first of a new series: shaky Lok Sabha seats in Bihar

■ **Sheohar:** Anand Mohan Singh, who represents this seat in the Lok Sabha, voted for the BJP during the no-confidence motion. It can safely be assumed that as a gesture, the BJP will not put up a candidate against him.

But Singh won the last election only because of Laloo Yadav's help. So what will happen this time?

■ **Jharkhandpur:** Surender Yadav of the RJD won this seat in the last elections, but if the Samata Party and the Janata Dal combine, it will be tough going for him.

■ **Lohardighas:** Held by the Congress(I) but likely to slip out of their grasp this time, because the Congress voted for Pabai Devi in the Assembly but opposed the Jharkhand Bill.

■ **Patna:** C.P. Thakur of the BJP won by a few thousand votes in the last election, and it took 46 companies of paramilitary forces to conduct the election. This time this seat will go to the RJD.

■ **Manikpur:** The surprise of the pack. Laloo Yadav's seat. However, he hasn't visited his constituency even once since he was elected. In the last elections, the Rajputs, on instruction from Anand Mohan Singh, had supported Laloo. This time, Singh is helping BJP-Samata. The chances are Laloo will change the seat, may be to Chhapra.

So great things are expected from Priya's son.

Strange coincidence

■ It's a small world. Maneka and Sanjay Gandhi's son, Feroze Varun was holidaying in Scotland with a friend when he saw someone he least expected to see. Apparently Rahul Gandhi, his cousin, had chosen the same spot for a holiday.

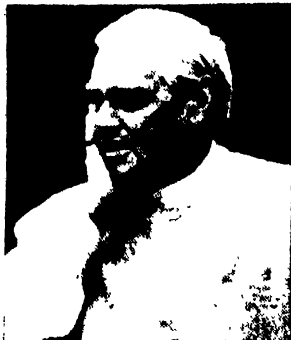
It is not known whether they paired up. If they had been with their mothers, they certainly wouldn't have icy glares would then have been the order of the day! But it is a bit of a coincidence that so many Gandhi's should head for the land of heather and gorse. •

Rahul Gandhi: met Varun at Scotland



Don't worry, be happy

The day Parliament was dissolved, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee was unconcerned that he was merely a caretaker Prime Minister. He happily ate *mithai*, drank tea and told his downcast friends that everything happens for the best.



A.B. Vajpayee: making a point

He related a little story to illustrate this: apparently, a King decided to see for himself how effectively his kingdom was governed. He put his Prime Minister in jail and went to the jungle. There, while fighting off wild animals, he lost a finger. Deeper in the jungle he was captured by a tribe which believed in human sacrifice. The witch doctor of this tribe was about to behead him when he noticed that he didn't have a finger therefore he was an imperfect human being and not good enough to be given to God. So the King was released and found his way back to his kingdom.

When he had released his Prime Minister from jail and was telling him about his horrific days in the jungle, the PM sighed deeply. "Why are you sighing?" said the King. "Sire, I'm just relieved that you'd put me in jail before you went, said the Prime Minister."

"Why?" asked the King. "Because," said the PM, "If you hadn't, I would have had to go with you into the

HEARD IN NEW DELHI

Q: Why does the PM live on Race Course Road?

A: Because horse-trading is the only way of getting there.

A BUREAUCRAT

jungle. And you might have been a finger short, but all my fingers are intact. So I would have been the one to be sacrificed. So you're quite right. Everything happens for the best."

Now who's the Sonia Gandhi in this story?

Blame it on Arjun

Leader of the Opposition, Sharad Pawar, is furious with Arjun Singh. A

man who is MP of neither House brought down a Lok Sabha and forced the country to go for elections, and yet, no one takes any action against him?

So Pawar has decided to take action. He has given his blessings to a signature campaign that is doing the rounds in Delhi, seeking action against Arjun Singh for his irresponsible and adventurous politics.

The campaign has lost ground since Congress president Sonia Gandhi seems to



Arjun Singh: haunted by Pawar

be ready for elections. But Sharad Pawar will make Singh pay for this. And soon.

Of Kukis and Nagas

So what is the real story about the 'defection' of CPI MP in the Lok Sabha from Manipur, Kim? She didn't turn up in the House to vote, because she was allegedly down with asthma.

In fact, Kim wouldn't have come to the House even if she'd been hale and hearty. She belongs to Manipur, where the chief minister, Rishang Keishing, heads a Congress government. The Left parties had decided to support the Congress.

But in Kim's case there was a problem. She is a Kuki, Keishing is a Naga. The Kukis and Nagas are at war with each other. So while she could have made her peace with her party and voted for the Congress, she could never have gone back to Manipur and declared to the Kukis that she supported a Naga in a vote of confidence.

So she just fell ill and stayed away. •

CHECK-LIST

TV-savvy politicians

■ **Sitaram Yechury:** King of the TV screen. Smooth, good-looking, articulate, reasonable. Shame that he appears so often that he has nothing left to say.

■ **Jalram Ramesh:** At last, a national alternative to Mohan Guruswamy! Bright, handsome, charming, his blow-dried hair adds to his TV presence while his platform heels are hidden from view.

■ **Rangarajan Kumaramangalam:** In any movie shooting, he would be reprimanded by the director for scene-stealing because his standard trick is make faces while the other man is delivering dialogues. But if it works for Annu Kapoor, why not Ranga?

■ **Kamal Nath:** Known in Congress circles as the leader of the opposition on Star TV. Always ready with an opinion, even when he is not authorised to provide one. This makes anchors happy and the Congress high command very unhappy.

■ **Amar Singh:** One day, they will make a television programme that does not feature Amar Singh. But till then viewers will have to keep adjusting the remote control and pushing the volume down every time Amar Singh begins to shout.

■ **G.K. Moopanar:** The only man who requires subtitles, no matter what language he speaks.

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BJP: TAKING CARE OF CARETAKING

SUNDAY



FEVER PITCH

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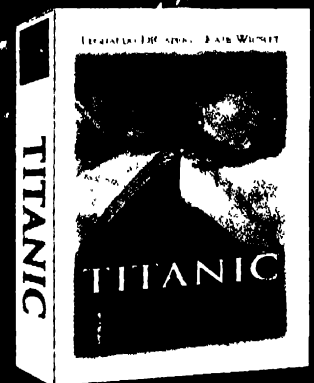
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B r o u g h t t o y o u b y B A R O N

Letters.....	4
Sight and Sound.....	6
Seen.....	7
Spotlight.....	32
News.....	59
Sunday Week.....	63
Business Diary.....	64
Random Notes.....	65
Delhi Diary.....	66



CINEMA

A Rite of Passage

The entry of Bollywood into Hindi cinema



MANI-TALK

Mani Shankar Aiyar..... 8

POWER PLAY

Rajiv Shukla..... 11

THE SOUTH BLOCK

Inder Malhotra..... 27

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FEVER STORY 38

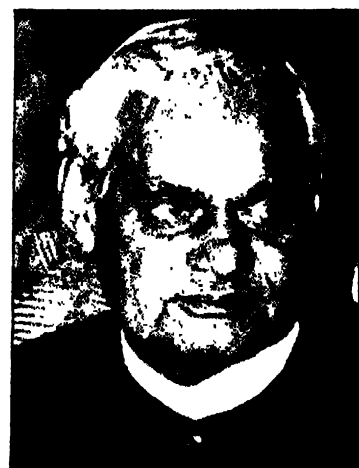
Fever pitch

Can India repeat 1983?

SPECIAL REPORT 12

Caretaker who?

Understanding the controversy over the powers of the BJP government



TRENDS 30

Just add music

More and more companies are discovering that it helps to send the message across



Going awry

This refers to the cover story *What a mess!* (2—8 May). No longer patient, Sonia Gandhi manipulated and made compromises to ensure the Congress' primacy and the BJP's demolition. To seize power and prevent the return of the Vajpayee government, a deter-

paralysis of governance were largely due to Sonia's machinations. The electorate will never forgive her and the Congress has to pay a heavy price for it in the coming elections.

Ratan Kaul, Bombay (Maharashtra)

■ You have correctly pointed out the leaders responsible for the political mess. But, two photographs were missing — one is the Bofors ghost and the other is Sonia Gandhi, whom the ghost keeps haunting now and again.

The immediate provocation to bring down the BJP government came when it sought the President's sanction to prosecute Madhavsinh Solanki and S.K. Bhagnagar in the Bofors case. The panicky Sonia informed Subramaniam

gress was in no position to cobble up a majority and fulfil its constitutional responsibility. Sonia who masterminded the coup miscalculated that the fear of elections will make some allies of the BJP prostrate before her. Her calculations went awry and hence the complete mess-up. Come September and the electorate is waiting to take its revenge.

V.K. Agarwalla, Calcutta (West Bengal)

Laughter and sunshine

Kudos to SUNDAY for giving its readers an insight into the political cartooning in India (*Media savvy*, 18—24 April). It's unfair that though the cartoonists' creativity is far superior to

with their ability to bring humour into even the most depressing news of India, the masses of the country will always remain grateful to them for bringing sunshine and laughter into their otherwise dreary lives.

Nallni Sudhakaran, Dubai (UAE)

Use your gumption

This refers to the story *The last 48 hours* (25 April—1 May). Considering that the current political impasse is without precedence, President K.R. Narayanan was right in emphasising that a decision on a new caretaker government should be taken with due attention to its significance for the future of the country. The Congress's failure to muster up a majority sends out a clear signal that neither the Congress nor any Third Front is able to provide any feasible alternative at the Centre. The stumbling block, of course, was the conflict of interests of the Congress and Samajwadi Party.

The Vajpayee government has been relieved of the AIADMK's whiphand. But the BJP-led coalition may be held to ransom by other small allies if the BJP fails to come to any pre-poll alliances.

President of India must take an initiative in framing a new law that no ally should be allowed to withdraw its support after an alliance is reached before the election. This will save the country from the utter chaos of non-governance. The electorate should exercise their gumption before casting their votes as they are now fed up with the politicians whose wanton self-interest is ruthlessly exposed.

Tarun Malkani, Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh)



Sonia Gandhi: has learnt a lesson in political hardball

mined Sonia made a number of clumbdowns.

Ever since Subramaniam Swamy's tea party, Sonia left no stone unturned to achieve what every politician wants. Though she was determined to project herself as a key player in national politics, the latest political imbroglio and the virtual

Swamy that she was ready to topple the BJP government and that he could remind Jayalalitha that the Congress was more than willing in helping her out.

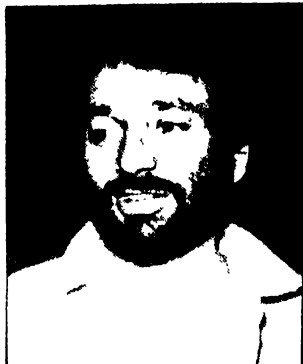
While Sonia went about the business of pulling down the government in such an undue haste, she failed to calculate the fact that the Con-

gress has been denied the honour and recognition due to them.

It's no understatement that they are no less or even more talented than their Western counterparts but for want of an organised promotion strategy they don't get due recognition. They must take heart in the fact that

Well done, Shekhar

The spotlight item *It's one all now* (25 April—1 May) made a delightful reading. Shekhar Kapur has really made India proud by his brilliant direction



Shekhar Kapur: has done India proud

although his film *Elizabeth* won Oscar in a less important category.

The Australian actress Cate Blanchett's dedicating the award to Sekhar Kapur was an exemplary humane gesture. Once again, well done Shekhar Kapur. We are really proud of you.

Millnd D. More, Nashik (Maharashtra)

Communist-bashing

So Jyoti Basu could not become the Prime Minister of India once again! (Left in the middle, 25 April—1 May). But going by the track records of his unbroken chief ministership of 22 years, one may conclude that it was a blessing in disguise.

It has been proved since the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, that the Communists are very poor administrators and completely devoid of economic ideas. This is why the vast Communist empire consisting of erstwhile Soviet union and the East

European satellite states collapsed. The only exception is Communist China which changed its course from the dogmatic and doctrinaire Communist philosophy.

The Communists have become corrupt ideologically, socially, politically and financially and the history of West Bengal for the last twenty five years has been a perfect example. The Communists have destroyed the educational institutions in the name of so-called reform. They have not even spared Presidency College which used to churn out the intellectuals of Bengal in large numbers. They do not hesitate to damage the R.K. Mission Schools so that these schools do not stand out in sharp contrast with the miserably-run government schools.

The Communists have destroyed the work culture. Their scions are fly-by-night characters. They allow their party cadres to siphon off funds by opening the public ledger accounts and putting all kinds of hurdles to CAG audit and investigations to such frauds including personal vilification of the deputy CAG who was supposed to conduct the audit. The

leaders of the party are hand-in-glove with unscrupulous promoters who grab land and fill up ponds and wetlands illegally. They have destroyed the demographic pattern of bordering districts by allowing migration of millions of Bangladeshis and regularising their citizenship.

Nirupam Halder, Calcutta (West Bengal)



An abortive coup

This refers to the story *The last 48 hours* (25 April—1 May). By pulling down the Vajpayee government unnecessarily, the Opposition has committed a grievous error. Though the

AIADMK ditched the BJP and toppled the government, it couldn't achieve her goal. The AIADMK supremo Jayalalitha has proved herself to be the real culprit and the electorate mustn't spare her in the coming elections.

Sameer Kumar, Bilaspur (Madhya Pradesh)

Jayalalitha: the mess-maker

Going Goebbels' way

This refers to the story *Head to head* (18—24 April). We have several institutions for historical research, development trusts like NMML IGNCIA. Government of India has been funding these bodies but these bodies work on a few chosen persons' ideas. Even historians in ICHR are reluctant to rectify this.

It will be well advised if the government forms only three — one for modern history, one for middle ages and one for ancient and pre-historic era. In this way important persons of all three era, be they reformists, politicians, religious persons will get due coverage. There are several persons, Matangini Hazra, for instance, new generations are completely unaware of. If we continue in Goebbels' way, we shall definitely have a distorted history.

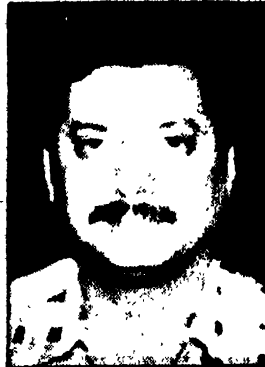
S.K. Das, Araria (Bihar)

SEPARATED AT BIRTH?

PRIZE RS 2001 FOR CONTRIBUTIONS



Chandan Basu
Businessman



Ramesh Gandhi
Industrialist

Contributed by Bikash Kumar Pradhan, Calcutta (West Bengal)

MILESTONES

APPOINTED: Soli J. Sorabjee, attorney-general, as the personal envoy of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights for East Timor.

UPHELD: by the Supreme Court, the powers conferred on state governments to ban lotteries of other states being operated in their territory.

CHOSEN: Shekhar Kapur, director of *Elizabeth*, to direct a movie based on the Broadway musical



Phantom Of The Opera. This was announced by Lord Andrew Lloyd Webber, creator of the musical, while presenting the Special Pride of India Award to Kapur at a Bollywood awards ceremony in New York.

NAMED: H.K. Dua, former editor of *The Indian Express*, *The Hindustan Times* and *The Times Of India*, as winner of the B.D. Goenka award for excellence in journalism for 1998.

JOINED: Renuka Choudhury, former Union minister and TDP member, the Congress on 7 May.

SANCTIONED: by President K.R. Narayanan the prosecution of former foreign minister Madhavsinh Solanki in the Bofors case.

SIGHT & SOUND



MAYA KAMATH/THE ASIAN AGE

■ I wanted to talk about a lot of things. But my time has been cut short by the long speeches here. Hence, I have nothing else to say.

E. K. NAYANAR, Kerala chief minister, before walking out in a huff from a function organised by Keralites in Dubai

■ The electorate will teach the saffron party and its new-found ally a lesson in the coming Lok Sabha elections.

SONIA GANDHI, Congress president, accusing the Samajwadi Party of strengthening communal forces



■ I feel filmmakers have to do their work within a given time-frame. Only Yash Chopra and Sooraj Barjatya work with clockwork precision. That's the only way to work in today's times.

MADHURI DIXIT, film actress

■ It will be better if both parties — Congress and BJP — merge into one.

MULAYAM SINGH YADAV, Samajwadi Party chief, explaining that he finds little difference between the two

■ The very fact that the player is participating in nets and physical build-up should answer the question.

ANSHUMAN GAEKWAD, Indian cricket coach, when asked how Sachin Tendulkar's back was holding on.

■ My 1999 summer collection is about evolving, refining and going back to the roots and then emerging with a whole new look. This exhibition is a culmination of a creative experiment. It's a contemporary look at the past.

ANJU MODI, fashion designer

SEEN

RELUCTANT RAMPAGE

Elephants and software pirates

It was a symbolic gesture portraying the tough stance taken by the National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) and the Business Software Alliance (BSA) against the menace of software piracy.

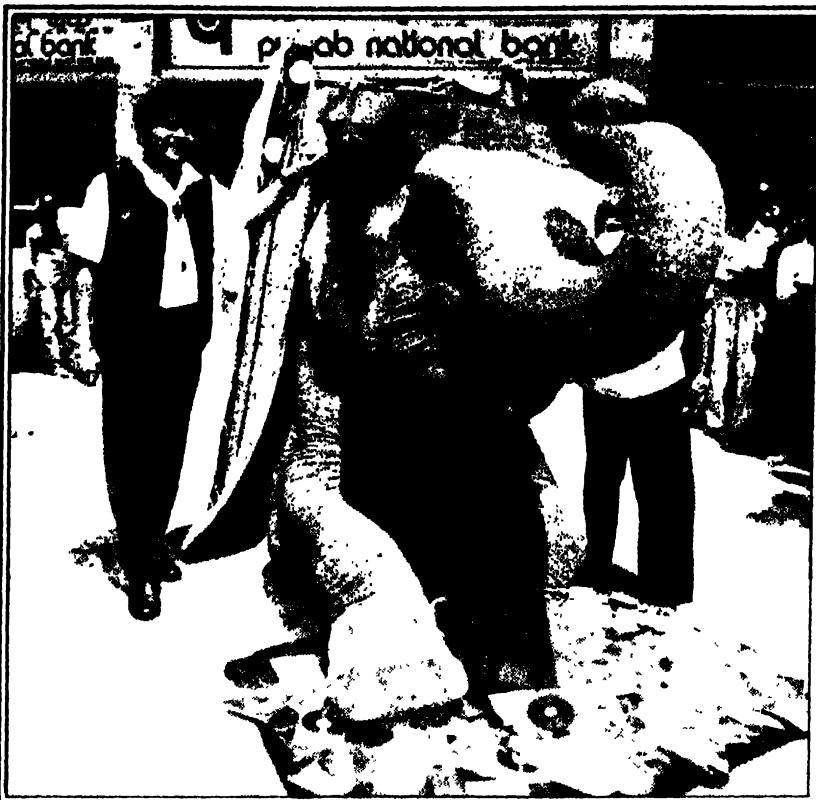
The venue: Nehru place — Delhi's software market (read pirated software market). The idea was original; NASSCOM and BSA decided to put their foot down, and a heavy one at that, against software piracy. They hired an elephant to crush pirated CDs. The scene: an empty parking place, lots of cameramen surrounding a piece of large black cloth covering a hundred-odd pirated CDs. It was a major photo opportunity. After all, it isn't every day you get to see an elephant on the rampage in a parking lot!

The pirated CDs were seized during recent anti-piracy raids. According to NASSCOM's survey, the piracy rate in India is estimated to be 60 per cent, with six out of ten personal computers loaded with illegal software, accounting for a loss of over Rs 700 crore annually to legitimate software companies. The anti-piracy drive plans to attack end-users and resellers.

The animal which was to stamp out pirated software arrived all dressed up for the event, sporting NASSCOM and BSA banners. Cameras started clicking. Atop the elephant was NASSCOM's president Dewang Mehta. The photographers asked if the cloth could be dispensed with — for better pictures. Mehta ruled this out. What about the elephant's feet? What if it should hurt itself?

Then the big moment came. The elephant approached the pile. And then acted as if it was hypnotised. It refused to budge. It moved back, raised its trunk and trumpeted. The photographers scurried backwards. It was hard to tell who was more frightened: the elephant of the photographers or the cameramen of the elephant.

By then, a crowd had gathered wondering what the *tamasha* was all about. Apart from the regular



STAMP OUT PIRACY: NASSCOM president Dewang Mehta with the elephant

presswallahs, merchants trooped out of their shops. For them it was the most exciting, entertaining lunch break they'd had in a long time. The elephant did some more *nakhra*.

After much coaxing and cajoling, the elephant languidly stepped on the CDs. But its efforts were half-hearted; it managed to crush only a few. Then it began to enjoy itself. It got so comfortable that it knelt on the stacks of CDs and posed for photographs. Finally, feeling very much at home, it relieved itself in public.

The aim of this whole exercise was to set an example and create strong feelings among people against piracy. The elephant was hired to symbolise the steps that NASSCOM and BSA are taking to counter software theft in India. Dewang Mehta explained: "There is a misconception in India that copyright implies the right to copy. We want to remove this misconception."

So, after an entertaining afternoon of learning about ending piracy, and what elephants do in their lunchtime, everyone went home. •

Parneet Shergill/New Delhi

"There is a misconception in India that copyright implies the right to copy. We want to remove this misconception," says Dewang Mehta

The BJP's 1999 M

Mani-Talk scoops Advani's secret jottings

Dear Diary,



Damn, damn, damn. The Congress has once again scuppered my plans. I was looking for a collapse of our government after Vajpayee had thoroughly discredited himself. I would then have emerged as his obvious successor. Just as I did when Vajpayee's "Gandhian socialism" got us exactly 2 seats in the Lok Sabha in the 1984 elections. That is

when I discovered Ram. That is when I got them to understand that Ayodhya is not some local UP issue. I told them: "Do you know that in none of our manifestos since 1952 have we ever mentioned Ram? Is this the way to Hindutva?" I also told them: "In none of the manifestos since 1952 have we ever mentioned Hindutva. Is this the way to capture the Hindu heart of a Hindu nation?" That is how I brought the *mandir-masjid* centre-stage. And befooled that stupid V.P. Singh into an electoral understanding with us which got him Race Course Road — and me on the road from Somnath to Ayodhya, 2 to 88 — and all my own doing! If we'd stuck with the Vajpayee line, we'd be selling peanuts in Chandni Chowk. Frankly, I'm the only brain in this set-up — even if I have to say so myself.

Vajpayee does not understand politics. He is like that Sonia Gandhi — who cannot make up her mind whether to be Mother Teresa or Indira Gandhi. Me, I'm different. No silly sentimentality about me. No imported morality. I know right from wrong. Ram is right. Jesus is wrong. And as for Islam, don't waste my time. I only want to profit from the Prophet. And Peace Be Upon The BJP.

BUT THE CONGRESS, instead of waiting for the correct moment — my moment — jumped into the fray the minute Jaya pulled the plug on us. I had warned Vajpayee that she was bound to withdraw support. After all, back in 1993, she withdrew her invitation to me to lunch at Poes Gardens. I had gone to Chennai to teach the Muslims of Triplicane just who is the Boss de la Boss when they tried to outdo our Ganesh Chaturthi procession with a Milad-un-Nabi procession of their own. To score Narasimha Rao, Jaya asked me over. Then *Mani-Talk* scooped the conversation I proposed to have with her. And she took off to Hyderabad, leaving me lunchless in the lurch.

Vajpayee said, on the other hand, she spent crores of state money renovating Hindu temples and raising the salaries of



ANUP RAY

A.B. VAJPAYEE: What, I ask you, what can be done with such a man? A secular snake. Nurtured in our bosom. He does not even want to tom-tom Sonia's birthplace

Brahmin priests. Surely, he said, that made her trustworthy. I told him, "Our NRI friends in the USA tell me there is an American expression. there's no such thing as a free lunch. This wretched woman did not even given me lunch — although I was willing to pay for it with not only our support but that of the entire Hindu pantheon. How, Vajpayeeji, how do we trust this woman?"

But trust Vajpayee. If there is an opportunity to bungle, he is not the man to miss it. Not only did he do a deal with her, he accepted all her impossible conditions — close down the

Manifesto

DMK, punish the judges who have agreed to try me, return the saris and *chappals* the CBI took from my cupboards, make Sasikala the foreign minister. He baulked at nothing. Worse, he told her I was still upset about being refused lunch. She's sworn to get me since.

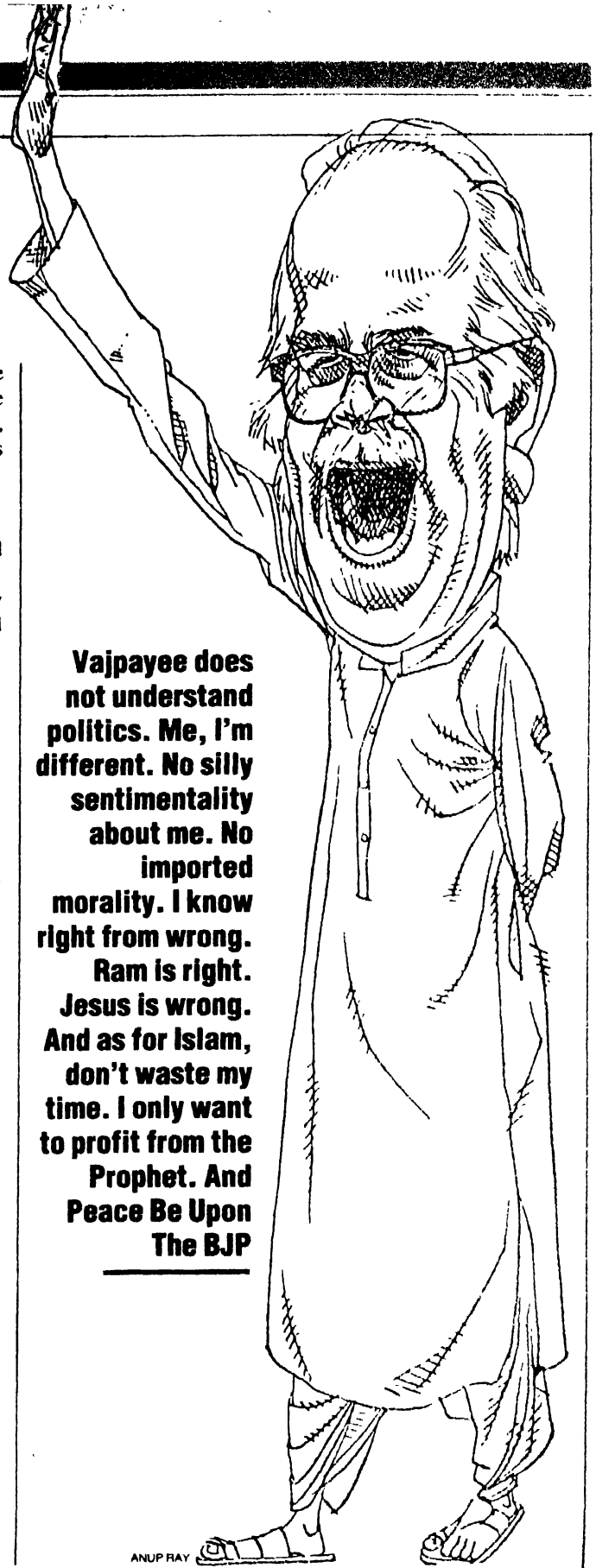
I asked Vajpayee: why? Matter of principle, he replied. Since she has done so much to restore the Dravidian movement to Hinduism, would that not, he asked, be the principled thing to do? Of course. But what has principle got to do with politics? Still, I let it go at that. And waited till Vajpayee really got into trouble to pull off my *coup d'état*. I got the DMK and all their Periyarists on to our side. Now that they are with us, they dare not repeat all those things Periyar said about the iniquities of Ram, the glory of Ravana, the hatefulness of the Brahmins, the sins of Hindutva, and the equivalence of Self-Respect to Atheism. I mean, how, when they are allied to us, can the DMK remain allied to Periyar? Sweet revenge, no, that Periyar should have joined Jinnah on the Muslim League platform at Madras on 10 April, 1941, to demand that Pakistan be established (with Dravidistan then to follow), and now to have the followers of Periyar fall at the feet of Akhand Bharat? What better way, I ask you, to avenge my being driven out of Sindh?

VAJPAYEE DOES NOT understand that all alliances are opportunistic, all allies are bedfellows of convenience, all understandings are for the time being only. And that allies are the ladder we need to climb to the top, then kick from under our feet. Vajpayee thinks alliances are about making ourselves more acceptable to the voter. So he gives up Golwalkar and talks of Gandhi. Next he'll be giving up Deen Dayal Upadhyay and talking of Arjun Singh! Vajpayee wants to be moderate, reasonable, sensible. What use I ask you, is a man like this? Do we want to be moderate — or Hindu? Reasonable — or BJP? Do we want to be sensible — or ourselves?

Of course, we cannot win the coming Lok Sabha elections on our own. No denying that. But can we afford to get the support of our supporters — while losing our own support base? At least the two BJP MPs who got through in 1984 were genuine BJP types elected by honest-to-goodness knickerwallahs. What we've now got is a *ghich-pich*. Some 50 solid Hindutvists, some 50 believing Hindutvists, 50 more that lean to us — the rest time-servers who would not be able to tell Bhagwan from Shaitan if we served up the difference as *kada-prasad*.

Yet, Vajpayee suddenly announces that we won't have a manifesto at all. *Arre, pagal kutte ne usey kata hai kya?* An election without a manifesto is like *mishti doi* without sugar.

Vajpayee does not understand politics. Me, I'm different. No silly sentimentality about me. No imported morality. I know right from wrong. Ram is right. Jesus is wrong. And as for Islam, don't waste my time. I only want to profit from the Prophet. And Peace Be Upon The BJP





SONIA GANDHI: cannot make up her mind whether to be Mother Teresa or Indira Gandhi

DEBASHISH DEB

I always, sobs Vajpayee, wanted to be a Congress Prime Minister, but I was born in Gwalior, not Swaraj Bhawan, so I thought I'd sneak myself to the top of the Congress through some other party

Vajpayee says, what is the point of a BJP manifesto when the next government is not going to be a BJP government? Better, he says, accept that the next government will be another mammoth coalition in which none of the other partners will accept anything near to our hearts. Let them draw up the Agenda for Governance. Then leave it to us to provide the governance.

Then it does not matter to you, I snarl, if the BJP ends up with two-and-a-half ministries and someone else's priorities? You mean you really want your priorities, an astonished Vajpayee asks. Of course, I reply, where have all your principles gone? Into the Congress manifesto, confesses Vajpayee shamefacedly. I always, sobs Vajpayee, wanted to be a Congress Prime Minister, but I was born in Gwalior, not Swaraj Bhawan, so I thought I'd sneak myself to the top of the Congress through some other party. And then, he added to my horror: "I really believe in the National Agenda of Governance."

THE MAN'S CERTIFIABLE! Some people will stop at nothing. What, I ask sternly, is your position on Article 370? Farooq told me he did not want it removed, quoth Vajpayee, so I've announced it must stay. And on the Uniform Civil Code? Why bother, replies Vajpayee, it may lead to a Uniform Fiscal Code — and all those Hindu Undivided Tax-Fiddles will stop voting for us. And minority education rights? Well, says Vajpayee, I got Murli Manohar Joshi to withdraw his Saraswati Vandana papers. And, I say, conversions? Vajpayee furrows his brow. Then brightens up. "Why not a national debate?" says he.

What, I ask you, what can be done with such a man? A secular snake. Nurtured in our bosom. He does not even want to tom-tom Sonia's birthplace. Where were you born? he asks me. Where the Rajmata? Sita, he reminds me, was from Nepal, Kaikeyi from Russia, Gandhari from Afghanistan. Foreigners all. But daughters-in-law of India. Ergo, Indian. Let's leave it, he suggests, at that.

But, I mean, can you? Not play our trump card? Merely because it would be a low and wretched thing to do? So I think up two clever ploys. One, I tell the world we are not making Italy an issue — it is already an issue. Oh, clever, clever me! And then comes my ace. If Vajpayee wants no BJP manifesto for 1999, so be it. But remember, there is the 1998 manifesto. It's so recent, it cannot be denied. Moreover, we'd written it for five years — and there's still four of the five left to go. So, I tell Vajpayee, you can have your NAG till the elections. Then, our Manifesto '98 will take over. And if it doesn't, then I'll take over. So, ta-ta, bye-bye, Vajpayeeji. It's beddy time for you. •

Politics apart

The Opposition and the government agree on economic and foreign policies



It is a good trend that the Opposition and ruling parties are coming together on the issues of national importance. So far, almost on all global issues, India has given a

message of political unanimity. During the last six months the Congress and the BJP made joint efforts on many issues in the international arena where India's prestige was involved.

In fact, right from WTO proposals to telecom policy, the Congress supported the government stand in national interest. Now, a crucial decision will have to be taken in September on whether India should sign the CTBT or not. Most political observers are of the view that the Congress leadership is not going to oppose the government move.

The government has to show its cards on the CTBT in September when it comes up at the United Nations and India has to take a public position on the US-sponsored resolution. So far, the indications are clear. After a great deal of talks between external affairs minister Jaswant Singh and Strobe Talbott it seems that India may sign the CTBT.

The BJP is slightly apprehensive that the Congress might make political capital of the issue during the Lok Sabha elections. Also, one of the reasons why the BJP wanted elections in June was that a regular government could take the final decision on the issue.

After the Election Commission's decision, the caretaker government will have to take a final view on the subject as the deadline fixed by the United Nations cannot be changed. Certain BJP leaders also tried to get in touch with the foreign policy experts in the Congress to find a solution by which India could give an impression of togetherness.

Discussions are going on in the Congress on CTBT. Leaders like Manmohan Singh, Pranab Mukherjee and others are not very adverse to the signing of the CTBT. K. Natwar Singh, adviser

to Sonia Gandhi on foreign affairs, is also not against the signing, but wants the BJP government to do it. By and large the opinion in Congress circles is that the party should neither oppose nor support the caretaker government on this issue.

However, several Congress leaders think that the government should be exposed on all the issues and political mileage must be taken of every situation keeping elections in mind. The government can be dubbed as a stooge of the

ce Regulatory Authority.

Unfortunately, the government could not bring the insurance Bill in the Lok Sabha with the new draft prepared by the standing committee of the House headed by Murli Deora. Now the matter seems to be deferred till the new Lok Sabha is constituted. The Congress also did not oppose the government on the PIO cards and the economic reform proposals in the last Budget presented by Yashwant Sinha.

The wider view in the Congress is that

Congress president Sonia Gandhi believes that matters of foreign policy and national importance should not be used for political gains and there must be unanimity on certain issues



Americans if it signs the CTBT and it will ridicule their slogan of *swadeshi* also.

But Congress president Sonia Gandhi believes that matters of foreign policy and national importance should not be used for political gains and there must be unanimity on certain issues. It is learnt that because of pressure from Sonia, Congress leaders in the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha had supported the government on the patents Bill and the Insuran-

ce Regulatory Authority. since he has adopted the economic reform policies initiated by Manmohan Singh by giving up the much publicised *swadeshi* economy, why should it oppose the Budget proposals? Similarly, the Congress did not come in the way of adopting the new telecom policy, which is on the lines of the telecom reform plan prepared by N.K. Singh, a member of Manmohan Singh's team during the Narasimha Rao government. •

Tenants, Not

The BJP says being caretakers shouldn't cramp its style. The Congress says the BJP is acting beyond its brief. The President wants to be kept informed. Understanding the politics of caretaking

When defence minister George Fernandes and foreign minister Jaswant Singh called on the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) on 7th May to clarify their position on being caretakers, they found M.S. Gill in aggression mode. Fernandes and Singh explained that they believed that a mere announcement of elections was not enough to reduce the ruling coalition to a caretaker government. It was not until a notification was issued and legal notice given of an election, that the government assumed caretaker status.

What is more, a schedule for an election had to be announced in consultation with the government — the Election Commission could not arbitrarily order an election.

The ministers were polite but firm. They pointed out that there was a government in place; it hadn't ceased functioning just because it had lost majority and it was the appropriate authority for the Election Commission to discuss the schedule with.

The CEC was buying none of this. "You don't believe there should be a model code of conduct?" he asked argumentatively. That's not the point, said the ministers, patiently. The issue is the date from which the model code of conduct should become valid. They also pointed out that the model code of conduct should not become a means for the Election Commission to displace the Government of India.

This debate continues. When does a government become caretaker? What is it entitled to do in its caretaker phase? Should it yield administrative ground to the Election Commission and the President?

Given that there are only administrative rules governing the government's caretaker conduct and no constitutional guidelines, the debate can become ugly, as it has in the last two weeks.

Not surprisingly, the Congress — which has toppled governments but has never been toppled itself and so has never really been a caretaker at the Centre — feels that



Atal Behari Vajpayee with his council of ministers: taking care of caretaking

The Prime Minister himself indicated that since the Budget had been passed after his government lost the confidence of the House, the government could go ahead and implement all welfare and development programmes announced in it

Squatters



Caretaker par excellence

Some of the decisions by caretaker Prime Minister I.K. Gujral—at the time, K.R. Narayanan was already President of India

1. Waive a Rs 8,000 crore loan to Punjab. The uncharitable claimed this was part of Inder Gujral's election expenses (He later fought a Lok Sabha election from the state with Prakash Singh Badal's help).
2. The Cabinet also approved of the renaming

of Amritsar Airport after a Sikh Guru. But this was not carried out.

3. Appointment of five governors and four Heads of Mission. (This includes then foreign secretary's appointment as the Indian High Commissioner to London).

4. Approved the restructuring of Public Sector Units.

5. Signed a treaty of Mutual Legal Assistance with France. (This is essentially an extradition treaty).

6. Entered into an agreement for judicial assistance with the United Arab Emirates.

7. Amended the Representation of People's Act (1951) to allow Kashmir migrants to vote by a postal ballot.

8. An Air Service Agreement between Malta and India.

9. An Air Service Agreement between Armenia and India.

10. Approved of an amendment in the Income Tax Act.

11. Gave an extension to then water resources secretary Mata Prasada. This made it difficult for the next government to overlook his candidature as the next Cabinet secretary. It became all the more embarrassing when the next government turned out to be a BJP-led one — the party is strongly identified by its upper-class vote-bank and Prasada is a Dalit. However, the government wriggled out of the situation.

12. Appointed his friends from the India International Centre on the Prasar Bharati Board. Henceforth, this began to be known as the FDG (Friends of Gujral). Also promulgated the new Prasar Bharati Ordinance that removed the age restriction on the CEO.

13. Gujral also attended a three-nation Economic Summit in Dhaka, where he objected to being addressed as 'caretaker Prime Minister'.



Inder Kumar Gujral: objected to being addressed as 'caretaker PM'

We're not caretakers!

*Some of the decisions taken by Vajpayee's caretaker government.
(President of India — K.R. Narayanan)*

■ **One:** Almost the first decision taken by the 'caretaker' Cabinet is to set up a commission of inquiry into Netaji Subash Chandra Bose's 'disappearance'. Although this had been promised much before the vote of confidence, Opposition leaders claim that this was the pay-off to the Forward Bloc and the Revolutionary Socialist Party for not voting against the government during the vote of confidence.

■ **Two:** The Prime Minister addressed the nation on Doordarshan on 28 April (two days after the President dissolved the 12th Lok Sabha) and lamented that his government was pulled down for no reason. The Congress sent three CWC members to Rashtrapati Bhavan with a memorandum asking him to 'instruct the incumbent caretaker government not to use the official media in a partisan manner'.

■ **Three:** The Government of India reshuffled as many as 21 secretaries — including the home secretary. While the government described these as 'routine transfers' the Congress sent another three member team to Rashtrapati Bhavan to protest against this reshuffle.

■ **Four:** Appointed Ram Naik as minister of state for home. The mistake that the government made here was that it said that the reason behind Naik's appointment was that Advani was too busy handling party affairs (Advani has been put in charge of the party's campaign committee.) Immediately the Opposition asked if party work was more important than running the government.

■ **Five:** Told the CBI to go ahead on both the Bofors and the JMM cases. (In the Bofors case, the first charge-sheet

there is no room for argument. After the government reshuffled as many as 21 bureaucrats last fortnight, the Congress submitted a memorandum to Rashtrapati Bhavan. According to the note, "for the government to declare that between now and the Constitution of the 13th Lok Sabha...the present council of ministers is a regular government is inconsistent with basic constitutional principles."

The government (caretaker or otherwise) is ready with its defence. In fact, sensing the mood after the meeting with the CEC, the co-ordination committee has armed itself with a note citing legal precedents, prepared by the constitutional expert Fali Nariman.

The note states that after dissolution, Article 73 (3) of the Constitution is no longer applicable (that the council of



The BJP has a twintrack policy. On the one hand it is emphasising on the legitimacy of its government, on the other, planning on using this time to rectify its image as a non-performer

ministers with the Prime Minister as its head is collectively responsible to the House of the people. But, there is a legal loophole here. A Supreme Court judgement in the case of U.N. Rao vs Indira Gandhi 71(2) says that after dissolution of the House, the Prime Minister and the council of ministers remain, even though they are no longer responsible to the House of the people.

There are many who see this is a blessing, unhampered as they are by Parliament. A minister went so far as to say that at last the government could go ahead with the task of governing without bothering about threats of destabilisation. What more evidence do you want of this fact, considering that it took seven minutes for the Lok Sabha to pass the Budget?

is expected to be filed soon). Since these are political cases rather than routine ones, this has come in for some amount of flak.

■ Six: The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved the setting of a Rs 100 crore venture capital fund for one of the Prime Minister's favourite sectors — the Information Technology sector.

■ Seven: Cleared Gas Authority of India's proposal to set up a Rs 361.37 crore gas project at Gandhar.

■ Eight: Approved of the Rs 61 crore modernisation plan for the first stage of the 345 megawatt Salal hydel power project in Jammu & Kashmir.

■ Nine: The ministry of civil aviation signed a memorandum of understanding with the Karnataka state government for the Bangalore International Airport. The minister also said that plans for disinvestment of Air India, Indian Airlines and Indian Tourism Development Corporation would begin soon. According to Ananth Kumar, this decision had been taken before (the government fell) and would be implemented 'since the government was functioning with normal powers'.

■ Ten: The foreign ministry is going ahead with its schedule, except for the sensitive decision on whether to sign the CTBT. (However, Gujral has attacked the government for going ahead with its plans to sign this treaty.)

■ Eleven: At the CII meet recently, the finance minister announced that the process of privatisation of the insurance sector would carry on.

■ Twelve: The coal ministry is also giving approval to pending projects.

■ Thirteen: The telecom minister has asked the Department of Telecom to get on with the process of recovering current dues (totalling upto Rs 4,000 crore) from private operators, along with 25 per cent of the arrears. And the minister plans to implement the new telecom policy.

So there is palpable relief among ministers, who concede wryly that so far the BJP-led government was more involved in floor-management than in governing.

But once the Congress got wise to this, it realised that it had plunged into a trap of its own making. It wanted late elections and a crippled government in the interim. In fact, the memorandum handed out by the Congress party cautions the President that the council of ministers may "do acts which both directly and indirectly could bolster their electoral prospects" and asks him to restrain the BJP. But instead it got an aggressive go-ahead government.

The BJP has a twintrack policy. On the one hand it is emphasising on the legitimacy of its government, on



CEC M.S. Gill: In aggression mode



Fali Nariman: citing legal precedents

the other, planning on using this time to rectify its image as a non-performer. Ministers have been asked to go ahead and clear all pending work — unless it involves major policy decision, as in the case of taking the decision on signing the CTBT. The Prime Minister himself indicated (at an awards function organised by NABARD, held in Delhi on 7 May) that since the Budget had been passed after his government lost the confidence of the House, the government could go ahead and implement all welfare and development programmes announced in it. And keeping with this spirit, he announced that the guidelines for the revamped Rural Infrastructure Development Fund would be finalised by the month end.

And as expected, the government has a legal precedent to back this stand. (A Supreme Court judgement by Justice Hidayatullah in 1986 states that: the position of a minister is difficult. It is obvious that he cannot cease to function when his election is due. If everyone of his acts done bonafide is to be construed against him...the administration must necessarily come to a standstill. Nariman repeats this point in his note.)

Of course, the moot point here is what is bonafide and what is not. For instance, is the Prime Minister's address to the nation on 28 April (which may have read better than most of his other speeches, but sounded like an election address, all the same) a bonafide act? And more to the point, who is to decide?

Unfortunately, elections are still five months away. In fact, cynics point out that while this government had only thirteen months to rule with the confidence of the House, it has been given half that much time to remain in power — without enjoying the confidence of the people.

But that's a lot of time. Last week, the Prime Minister had an hour-long meeting with K.R. Narayanan to apprise him of the decisions taken by the government. Both sides have agreed to make this a regular feature. That is one way of working this out.

Until of course, the next round of bureaucratic transfers or gubernatorial appointments when the Opposition will march to Rashtrapati Bhavan and hand in another memorandum. And the government will go scurrying for some more legalese to rebut that.

That's how it's going to be until end September. •

Priya Sahgal/New Delhi

Will the BJP win new ground?

With just over a hundred Lok Sabha seats, the eastern states of India have some interesting political characteristics: the north-east which contributes 25 seats is predominantly tribal, with each tribe and clan having its own fiercely asserted identity. Voting patterns, therefore, are not clearly discernible, except that the church plays an important role in the elections.

Among the parties in the seven north-eastern states, only one, the Arunachal Congress, is an ally of the BJP. A few months ago, this, too, split and the breakaway group merged with the Congress.

In West Bengal, an implicit alliance was said to have been struck between the Congress and the Left Front in the 1998 elections to keep the BJP out. Ironically, this 'alliance' has yielded ground to the Trinamul Congress and the BJP. This trend is much more visible in the southern than in the northern part of the state. And in this election, Trinamul is likely to widen its base further. It is uncertain yet, whether it will also increase its tally.

In Orissa, two events in the last six months could bear on the election. One, the state, which has a Congress government, saw a change in leadership recently. Second, the anti-Congress Biju Janata Dal is poised for a split and the anti-Congress vote could be divided between the Janata Dal and the BJD.

While the change of chief minister could affect Congress's chances adversely, the two Janata Dals have yet to get their act together. Coupled with the several highly publicised attacks on Christians in Orissa and the blame on the BJP, it would appear that all parties have an equal handicap in this state.

SUNDAY picks out a few constituencies in the east which would be indicative of the trend of voting in the forthcoming general elections.

West Bengal

Basic facts

✶ The BJP's vote share has been erratic in the state. It was 11.6 per cent in 1991 at the height of the Hindutva wave, but

declined to 2.6 per cent in 1996, that is, after the demolition of the Babri Masjid. However, in 1998, though there was no clear-cut Hindutva wave, the BJP got 10.27 per cent of the votes.

✶ The Congress, by contrast, retained the bulk of its vote in 1991 and 1996. In 1991, it won five seats with 36.2 per cent of the vote and in 1996, it polled 40.9 per cent, getting nine seats. However, in the last election it was badly hit by Trinamul and could secure just 15.2 per cent. This figure could come down further in this election.

✶ For a party which began from scratch, with no organisation and no base, Trinamul did spectacularly in the last election, getting 23.7 per cent of the vote.

✶ Surprisingly, Trinamul got the full backing of the Bengali-speaking Muslims, though the Urdu-speaking Muslims rejected it for its alliance with the BJP.

✶ This election hinges on what the Congress's vote share in West Bengal will be. In some recent Assembly by-elections, the CPI(M)'s vote went up but Trinamul couldn't sustain its share.

✶ The panchayat elections revealed some interesting facts. There was 90 per cent unity between Trinamul and the BJP at the gram panchayat level where the former did well. However, at the uppermost tier, the zilla parishad, the CPI(M) reigned supreme. The lesson is: if the Opposition is divided between the BJP, Trinamul and the Congress, the

Eastw



ard ho



Left Front will retain its share of the vote in the Lok Sabha election.

So far there is perfect concert between the Trinamul and the BJP. If this continues, Trinamul may lose two seats but could gain up to 10.

Krishnagar

The predominantly rural constituency with 32 per cent Muslim voters has been a CPI(M) bastion since 1971. It even retained the seat during the Congress wave of 1984. Its candidate Ajoy Mukhopadhyay has been a runaway winner for the past four elections. Though the margin of victory in 1998 was a comfortable 40,000 plus, the seat will be indicative of the way rural Bengal swings this

time.

The BJP came a handy second last time to show that its 1991 performances (16.2 per cent — higher than the statewide showing of 11.6) was no fluke. Together with the Trinamul, the BJP makes a formidable opposition even in rural areas and the CPI(M) cannot be complacent about this development. Particularly so, because the Congress candidate has consistently polled over 40 per cent votes in all recent elections barring 1991. The

CPI(M)'s chance of retaining the seat depends on how much the Trinamul cuts into the Congress vote-bank that adds to the steady BJP base of 10 per cent.

Nabadwip

Another CPI(M) bastion in rural Bengal since 1971 (it even scraped through in 1984). This is a reserved seat with a Scheduled Caste vote strength of 23.5 per cent.

The advent of the Trinamul candidate, Ramendra Nath Biswas, in 1998 was expected to make things easier for the CPI(M). But the expected division did not take place and the Trinamul virtually ate into the Congress vote-bank and substantially reduced the CPI(M)'s lead to a shade over 41,000.

The BJP has demonstrated that it has a steady base of close to 10 per cent since 1991 and in a direct one-to-one contest between the CPI(M) and the Trinamul, the former will find the going tough. Like in other parts of rural Bengal, the CPI(M)'s organisational network will be really tested for the first time.

Diamond Harbour

This is one CPI(M) stronghold that nearly fell last time. It only proved that the party's organisational network is not invincible. The predominantly rural seat has 32 per cent Muslim and 16.3 per cent Scheduled Caste voters. This is probably the reason for the BJP's limited growth (only 8.8 per cent in 1991).

For a party which began from scratch, with no organisation and no base, Trinamul did spectacularly in the last election. This time, it is likely to widen its base further

The CPI(M) won in 1998 by just 6,000-odd votes — down from the 1996 margin of 40,000. The reversal was significant as Trinamul candidate Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar came second and Congress candidate Maya Ghosh managed to prevent a total washout of the party's vote-bank of over 40 per cent.

Part of the CPI(M)'s problems could also stem from its 1996 decision to deny ticket to the high-profile Amal Dutta — former Public Accounts Committee

chairman during the Bofors controversy. To maintain its winning streak, the party has to manage its home front better this time and also hope that there is no erosion in the Congress base to Trinamul's benefit.

Jadavpur

Having a fair sprinkling of the Bengali intelligentsia, the seat has been represented by women since 1984 when Mamata Banerjee shot into the limelight by humbling CPI(M) stalwart Somnath Chatter-



Krishna Bose: giant-killer

jee. CPI(M)'s Malini Bhattacharya became the next giant-killer in 1989 and forced Mamata to shift to Calcutta South in 1991.

Malini herself was humbled in 1996 by Krishna Bose of the Congress. In 1998, Bose crossed over to Trinamul and increased her margin, aided by the BJP, to nearly 80,000. The semi-urban constituency is affected by national politics more than any other. It has shown scant respect for seniority in choosing its MP.

Barrackpore

An industrial seat that shows the changing electoral fortunes in the state following the rise of the BJP and its alliance with Trinamul. CPI(M) candidate Tarit Baran Topdar retained the seat last time (fourth time in a row) but his margin was nearly halved to 28,000 as a result of the Trinamul-BJP alliance.

The good showing of the Trinamul

candidate was not just because of BJP vote base (48,000), but also because traditional Congress supporters turned away from the party. If more do so this time the CPI(M) will have another tough contest

Hooghly

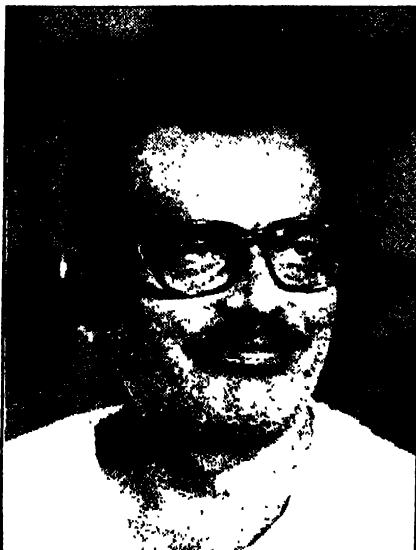
One of the seats that has never swung the Congress way, except in 1984, the CPI(M) nearly lost it in 1998 to Tapan Dasgupta. This despite CPI(M) candidate Rupchand Pal winning three times in succession since 1989.

The seat is one of the many in the state where the Congress retained a vote share of more than 40 per cent till 1996. This, however, was more an articulation of the anti-Left sentiment than an endorsement of Congress policies. That sentiment found the Trinamul a better claimant for the alternative to Left Front in 1998 and along with the marginal (around five per cent) base of the BJP, nearly upset the CPI(M) apple-cart last time.

Asansol

Psephologically, this is one of the urban seats that the CPI(M) has managed to retain primarily because of the split in Opposition votes.

In 1991 and 1996, the CPI(M)'s Haradhan Roy won primarily because the BJP polled 19.3 per cent and nine per cent respectively. The combined vote of the Congress and BJP in both elections



Tarit Baran Topdar: tough contest ahead



Priya Ranjan Das Munshi: 'safe seat'

was higher than that of the CPI(M) (45.1 per cent and 46.4 per cent).

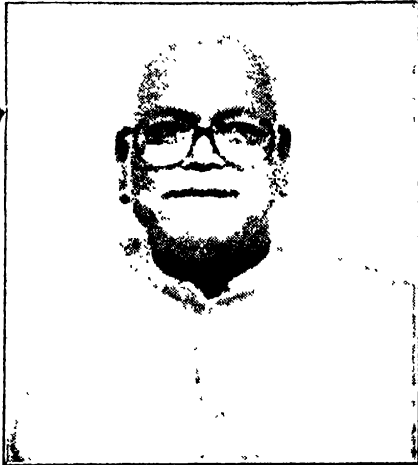
In 1998, the Trinamul candidate lost by a margin of 26,000-odd votes primarily because Congress candidate S.S. Ahluwalia prevented a total erosion of the party's vote-bank. The CPI(M) also fielded a new candidate last time — Bikash Chowdhury — and his performance and ties with voters will play an important role this time.

Raiganj

Priya Ranjan Das Munshi's search for a 'safe seat' was nearly successful in 1998 till he was tripped at the final post by Congress rebel candidate and a prominent state leader Golam Yazdani, who retained the seat even during the anti-Congress wave of 1989. The seat has been a Congress bastion and has gone to the Opposition (non-Left) only in 1977.

The CPI(M) won the seat for the first time in 1991. That too, on account of the high 16.4 per cent votes polled by the BJP. The percentage slipped somewhat in 1996 to 11 but was still sufficient to enable CPI(M) candidate Subrata Mukherjee win (41.8 per cent and 43.8 per cent in 1991 and 1996 respectively).

The constituency has a high Muslim voter strength (55 per cent). The outcome this time would depend on the Congress's choice of candidate, its internal conflicts and whether the seat is contested by Trinamul or BJP. If the Congress fields a weak candidate and the Trinamul gets the seat, the going will be tough for the CPI(M). This is a seat where the CPI(M) is dependent on its opponents for victory.



Kabindra Purakayastha: will Silchar return him this time?

Assam

Basic facts

Given their positions on protectionism, the Asom Gana Parishad and the BJP should be natural allies in the state. This however did not happen in 1991 and 1996 because of AGP fears of losing its base among caste Hindu voters and also because of the party's flirtation with the third front.

If that trend continues, the situation should be advantageous to the Congress as despite polling 38.9 per cent votes only, it won ten of the 14 seats in 1998. This was double the 1996 figure, even as its vote increased by only 7 per cent. Part of the reason is the multipolar nature of politics in the state with small regional parties and Independents playing a key role.

For the BJP, the story in 1998 was simple: it failed to improve on its solitary seat despite increasing its vote substantially from the 1991 mark of 14.9 per cent to 23.8 per cent. The BJP, however, came second in as many as nine seats.

The gains made by the Congress and the BJP in 1998 were primarily at the expense of the AGP which did not win a single seat. Its vote share also went down from 27.1 per cent to 12.7 per cent. The weakened base of the AGP has made the BJP hopeful of getting it to agree to an alliance. Psephologically, this would be advantageous but would sharpen division on the basis of community identity.

Silchar

Veteran Congress leader Santosh Mohan Dev faced a surprise defeat in 1998 at the hands of Kabindra Purakayastha. The constituency has a high Muslim voter strength of 30 per cent and the BJP (Purakayastha won in 1991 also when Dev shifted to Tripura) has attempted to consolidate Hindu votes on account of this.

Once a strong base of the CPI(M), the Left has lost out in recent years like in most parts of the state following the Assam agitation. Purakayastha will not have an enviable job on hand if asked by the party to defend his seat as Dev is making an all-out bid to win again.

Also Purakayastha's problems at the ministry has left him with little time to keep in touch with his constituency — something that Dev always did despite his ministerial obligations.

Karimganj

The BJP stepping stone into the state in 1991 and also a confirmation of its strategy of Hindu consolidation in constituencies dominated by Muslims (a high 45 per cent). Its candidates won twice in a row in 1991 and 1996 but in 1998 the party lost the seat narrowly by 10,000-odd votes.

Crucial in the constituency is the AGP vote that, if transferred to the BJP following an alliance, would most likely result in a comfortable victory for the BJP. If there is no pact, the BJP will have a contest on hand.



Santosh Mohan Dev: making an all-out bid to wrest his seat

Orissa

Basic facts

The two new elements in the 1998 elections in Orissa were the emergence of the BJD as a major player and its alliance with the BJP.

Essentially a bipolar state, Congress has been the dominant party. It has performed badly in elections only when there has been a consolidation of anti-



K.P. Singh Deo: the defeat in 1998 was predictable

Congress votes.

But for that to happen, there has always been the need for a towering anti-Congress leader — a slot first filled by Biju Patnaik and now being sought to be occupied by his son Naveen Patnaik.

Psephologically, Orissa used to be clubbed with the states where the BJP had little chance of winning a single seat (West Bengal was another). In 1989, the party had a vote share of just 1.2 per cent. But the split in the Janata Dal and the BJD's alliance with it changed the situation dramatically and led to the BJP opening its account.

In 1998, the Congress's share of votes rose by just around two per cent (from 44.9 to 42.6) but it won only five seats as compared to 16 in 1996. In contrast, the BJD polled just 28.7 per cent votes but won nine seats. The most important gain was made by the BJP whose vote share went up from 11.6 per



Naveen Patnaik with Advani and Valpayee: banking on the alliance

cent to 21.7 per cent.

✿ The major loser was the Janata Dal whose vote share has slipped in successive elections. It polled 49.4 per cent in 1989, 34.6 per cent in 1991, 30.1 per cent in 1996 and an all-time low of five per cent in 1998. This means that its vote has mainly shifted to the BJD and a small portion has been added to the BJP base.

✿ Overall, the Congress will find it tough to win even five seats this time if the BJD-BJP alliance continues and the state JD unit merges or allies with the BJD.

Dhenkanal

K.P. Singh Deo's defeat to Tathagata Satpathy in 1998 was predictable because in 1996, the JD candidate polled 32.6 per cent votes and the BJP 16 per cent. When combined this was more than the winning vote of Singh Deo.

This factor got a further boost owing to Tathagata's family links and the fact that his mother Nandini Satpathy, a sitting MLA from Gondia Assembly segment in the Dhenkanal Lok Sabha constituency, did not see eye to eye with Singh

Deo.

The BJP's growth in this seat has been between 1991 and 1996 when its vote share increased from a 2.7 per cent (static in 1989 and 1991) to 16 per cent. However, Satpathy's performance as MP has not been noteworthy and resentment against him is reportedly high.

The BJD-BJP alliance will have to rethink its strategy if the seat has to be retained. Or else, the Congress should find it easy to swing the undecided vote in its favour.

Bolangir

Even in 1991 (when it polled 18.1 per cent votes) the seat seemed a potential BJP territory provided it could work out alliances and come up with a strong candidate.

It came up with a good candidate (Sangeeta Singh Deo) in 1996 but failed to work out an alliance. That led to her coming a third despite polling 27 per cent votes. It also helped Congress candidate Sarat Pattanayak to win the seat polling just 34.8 per cent votes.

The BJD-BJP alliance changed the scenario in 1998 and Sangeeta became a first-time MP after winning by a margin

of more than 1.5 lakh votes. The fact that the seat was won by the Congress for the first time in 1980 also offers no solace to the party.

Predominantly rural with a combined SC-ST vote strength of 41 per cent, the constituency is susceptible to feudal sentiment and Sangeeta's links with the erstwhile royal family comes as an advantage.

Mayurbhanj

Reserved for the Scheduled Tribe, the seat went the BJP way in 1998 and is indicative of the strides made by the party in tribal areas.

Salkhan Murmu defeated veteran tribal leader Sushila Tiriya by a comfortable margin of nearly 75,000 votes. The two had fought each other in 1996 also when Tiriya polled twice the number of votes. But Murmu's personal base and the party's work among tribals had an impact.

The Staines' killings and the BJP's approach towards tribal issues shall dominate the elections this time and will determine whether the BJP retains its base among the tribals. •

Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay and the SUNDAY team



A file picture of Luizinho Faleiro and Atal Behari Vajpayee: exchanging greetings only?

NONE TO CHEER FOR

Ever since President's Rule was imposed on 10 February, Goans had been witnessing a cleansing process. No wonder, the announcement of Assembly elections on 4 June came as a shock. "Elections mean bad news, because they bring a spate of defections, corruption and political coups," remarked Eduardo De Souza, a senior citizen.

Except for the politicians, elections have not cheered anyone. The mood of the people was reflected by the Forum for Free Voting Enterprise (FFVE), formed within hours of the announcement. Explaining that two elections within a few months would put severe constraints on the state exchequer, FFVE chairman Tushar Manahar Sawkar demanded that Assembly and parliamentary polls be held simultaneously.

Evidently, there were factors which hastened the unwanted polls:

Goa goes to the polls on 4 June. But the electorate is not enthused

- Keenness by major political parties for early elections,
- Governor Lt-Gen. (retd) J.F.R. Jacob's plea for early polls, and
- A tedious procedure of summoning a special parliamentary session for extending President's Rule.

Nevertheless, Goa, with 1,135 polling stations for 9,09,018 voters spread over 40 constituencies, is poised to be the first state to hold voting electronical-

ly. Demonstration centres for familiarising voters with the machines have been set up. Merely 14 days are available for campaigning. The last date for filing nominations is 17 May, scrutiny will be held on 18 May and the last date for withdrawal is 20 May.

The Congress, which is the chief contender for power, is not without its usual woes. In order to curb dissidence, the party high command has decided to withhold the official list of nominees till the night of 16 May.

Goa Pradesh Congress Committee president Luizinho Faleiro made a plea to Sonia Gandhi on 5 May, seeking reconstitution of the state Youth Congress committee, dissolved by YC president Manish Tiwari on 30 April for indiscipline. Although the committee was reconstituted on 7 May, traces of rancour were evident.

A meeting at Cuncolim on 27 April turned out to be a platform to abuse fellow Congressmen with members of the block Congress committee almost coming to blows. Despite the facade of unity shown by the leaders as well as the aspiring candidates, the bitterness is expected to explode on the face, once the nominees are announced.

Hopes of having new, young Congress candidates for the ensuing elections waned with the closing of acceptance of nomination papers on 8 May. The party received 265 applications, several of them from defectors, including 'tainted' politicians.

Three former ministers including two chief ministers, Faleiro and Pratapsing Rane, besides Sanjay Bandekar, have made it easier for themselves by ensuring that they are the lone Congress candidates for their constituencies.

Faleiro was elected unopposed on two earlier occasions from Navelim. Rane, on the other hand, seeking renomination from Poriem, had garnered a margin of just 55 votes in the last Lok Sabha election.

The two sitting MPs, Francisco Sardinha and Ravi Naik, have decided to return to state politics by filing their applications. While Sardinha has sought a ticket from his traditional Curtorim constituency, Naik has preferred to shift to Ponda, instead of his native Marcaim.

All the MLAs of the dissolved Assembly, barring Joaquim Alemao, have sought renomination. Joaquim is vacating the Benaulim seat to enable his brother Churchill to contest. Churchill, contesting on a Congress ticket for the first time, is expected to face tough competition from Angelo Fernandes, the Congress nominee who came close to wresting the seat in the by-election following Churchill's election to the Lok Sabha in 1996. On an earlier occasion both Churchill and Joaquim had won from the United Goans Democratic Party (UGDP) platform.

Congress observer Melba Rebello declared that 'winnability' and 'loyalty' (to the party) would be the two guiding factors in choosing the candidates, but this was pooh-poohed by Congress sympathisers who said that even if a 'winnable' candidate is put up, chances of victory would be uncertain because seeing the same old candidates being projected in other constituencies would discourage the traditional Congress voter from voting, resulting in the victory of a non-Congress candidate.

Rebello's comment is a far cry from Ramesh Chennithala's, who had earlier stated that defectors would be denied tickets and that the ethics committee headed by A.K. Antony would be screening the candidates before finally choosing them. The only redeeming feature is the record number of 35 women filing their nominations.

Meanwhile, the Congress is making a last-ditch effort at seat adjustments with the Maharashtra Gomantak Party. Sharad Pawar is learnt to be interested in an alliance between the Congress and the MGP. He and his friend, former Union minister of state for law and justice Ramakant Khalap, are working out modalities for a tie-up between the two parties.

Initially the Congress was working out a 'seat adjustment' with the MGP in New Delhi, in a bid to check the BJP's rising popularity. At the last parliamentary polls, percentage-wise, the BJP came second after the Congress.

Faleiro, however, impressed upon the high command that the biggest task before the Congress was to select candidates, and the proposed seat adjustment would make matters more complicated. But the Congress leaders in New Delhi at one stage had agreed to give four seats to the MGP. These included Pernem, Mandrem, Dhargal and Quepem.

Going by the stress the Congress has been going through, it seems Sonia has been able to salvage the Congress's image in Goa by her efforts to keep the flock together and defectors and 'tainted' ministers out of the election fray.



Wilfred De Souza with Valpayee: any alliance on the cards?

First, she replaced GPCC president Shantaram Naik with Faleiro in early April, complemented by quietly appointing Ramesh Chennithala as an assistant to Madhavrao Scindia, who is in charge of Goa. Observers view this as a positive bid to quell the mounting rift in the state unit of the party. Naik was identified as being close to Rane, who was accused of manipulating the party to his advantage. This had divided the Congress with party workers demanding Naik's ouster. Scindia, too, was also viewed as being close to Rane, often taking decisions to





◆ his advantage.

Observers hoped that the appointments of Faleiro as the GPCC chief and Rane as chairman of the state election committee, Churchill, Naik and Sardinha as election and campaign managers were intended to block their bid to contest the elections under the party principle debarring functionaries from contesting.

Leaders of the MGP, the second contender for power, are not keen to have an alliance with the BJP. But many of the latter's followers have their roots in the MGP. There are also former RSS cadres and sympathisers in the MGP,

who are making efforts to bring the two together.

Former MGP ministers Shashikala Kakodkar and Prakash Velip are learnt to have negotiated with the BJP for seat adjustments, but at an MGP central committee meeting on 6 May was divided over having an alliance with the BJP and other parties.

While some of the leaders favoured alliance or seat adjustment with the BJP, some others preferred going it alone, and yet another group wanted to maintain the status quo: seat adjustment with regional parties like the Goa Rajiv Congress Party (GRCP) and the UGDP. Fear of a split within the party was gaining ground, after the party leaders virtually threw a gauntlet to Kakodkar.

"The party has already decided on seat adjustment with regional parties and this should be finalised within the next few days," said MGP general secretary Dharma Chodankar.

Though BJP spokesman Manohar Parrikar ruled out alliance with the MGP, he did not rule out a seat adjustment. There was speculation that the MGP was heading for a split. And an indication to this was given by state BJP president Suresh Amonkar when he said that leaders and workers of other parties will be admitted into his party at a grand function to be held on 15 May, after the ending of the *parivartan yatra* rally which started on 8 May.

One of the reasons MGP leaders were against having anything to do with the BJP was that they were still nursing the wounds of being let down by the latter

on two occasions. Soon after the last Assembly elections when it could have formed the government with BJP and UGDP support, the BJP decided not to have relations with the UGDP. And recently, when trying to form an alternative government led by Wilfred De Souza after Faleiro was ousted this February.

However, political pundits aver that if the MGP leadership sticks together and campaign seriously, the party can come close to the halfway mark, and in association with Independents or local groups, form a government. Neither the Congress nor the MGP could romp home on its own.

The BJP, the third contender, is trying to improve on its own by contesting all the seats. But it may be able to garner up to six seats, which would be an improvement on its previous tally of four if the MGP elements who had worked for the BJP in the last elections do so this time, too.

However, with the BJP having let down the MGP twice, some MGP sympathisers in the BJP may switch sides and support their parent party. In that case, the BJP will be left with only two seats, Valpoi and Madkai, where the RSS base and temple politics are strong.

Wilfred De Souza has lost his charisma considerably and it is doubtful whether his GRCP will be able to gain enough number of seats to be in the reckoning for alliances with either of the major contenders.

The UGDP is a spent force with the exit of Churchill Alemao. However, it could make a difference to the prospects of one or two Congress candidates in the south. Evidently, the BJP and the UGDP are in a position to upset the apple-cart, but not in a position to form a government on their own.

Some citizens have come together to form a party under the banner of Voice of Goa. Christian leaders have issued guidelines to members of the community to elect 'clean' candidates. Similar guidelines are sought by some quarters from the Hindu priests to issue a call for the defeat of corrupt and dishonest politicians.

A clear picture will emerge only after the filing of nominations is over. The turnout will surely depend on the selection of candidates by the various parties. But old horses are unlikely to enthruse the voter. •

Bosco De Souza Eremita/Panaji



**Congressmen
Pratapsing Rane
(extreme left), Ravi
Naik (centre) and
Churchill Alemao are
likely to contest the
elections despite being
appointed as party
functionaries**

Watchman without

Chief vigilance commissioner N. Vittal is seeking restoration of his statutory powers. But nobody seems to care

"When the King speaks the kingdom shakes; when the poor man speaks, only his beard shakes," rues N Vittal, chief vigilance commissioner, after the recent political crisis and a fractious Parliament devalued his new-found statutory status granted to him by an activist Supreme Court.

The CVC's discomfiture has made nonsense of the much-vaunted exercise undertaken by the Supreme Court to immune investigating agencies like the Central Bureau of Investigation and the Enforcement Directorate from "extraneous influences". The CBI and ED have gone back to the days when it did not have the "benefit" of Mr Vittal's supervision. Vittal wants the ordinance to be repromulgated by the caretaker Vajpayee government so that there is no break in its functioning and continued superintendence of the CBI and ED. "Our statutory status is an outcome of a Supreme Court order that the government agreed to implement. It has nothing to do with politics. So there is no reason why another ordinance cannot be brought in," explains Vittal.

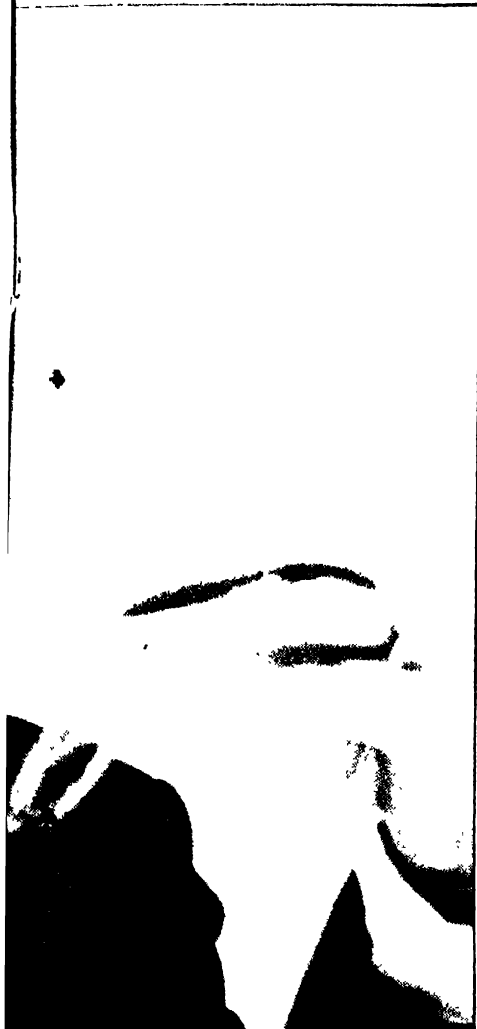
Interestingly, no one is really missing Vittal. The political class, incensed by the manner in which the judiciary has been trying to make ingress in their traditional domain, is obviously delighted. The CBI and ED top brass considered the CVC an avoidable nuisance. The corrupt vested interest, that was to be nailed through this tortuous exercise of creating an independent CVC, is revelling in this political instability and organisational chaos.



But before political chaos unscrambled it, the CVC, for full seven months, experienced the entire range of powers that the Supreme Court had decreed on 18 December, 1997. Save for institutionalising confusion, the CVC's new-found primacy achieved little. Neither the 'kingdom' nor the 'beard' seemed fazed by Vittal's academic interventions in curbing the malaise of governmental corruption. "The main function of the CVC was that the Prevention of Corruption Act against venal government servants is effectively tackled," clarified CVCN. Vittal.

A close look at the seven-month statutory reign of the CVC reveals that Vittal did not show his hand in any of those politically sensitive cases that the CBI or the ED was seized with. All the top politically sensitive corruption scandals that had rocked the country in the last few years and those that epitomised shoddy probe and, at times, blatant cover-up did not excite the CVC's curiosity. The Jain Havala scandal, which was the reason for the Supreme Court's extraordinary decision to pull out the institution of the CVC from the woodwork, Bofors and many other scams,

t beat



too, met with indifference. Vittal failed to leave his imprint on those new cases too that came up when he was firmly in the saddle.

Take, for example, the Romesh Sharma case. There was clear evidence that the government, for its own reasons, was manipulating the trajectory of the probe. Besides, the manner in which both Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and home minister L.K. Advani chose to give certificates to the Reliance industries when the investigation had just begun gave an impression that, as if,

Vittal did not really exist. The CVC too, for some reason, kept his counsel.

Even when the government decided to constitute the coordination committee to look into the Romesh Sharma affair, the CVC was not consulted.

This was in spite of the fact that the functions and powers of the commission, as detailed in the ordinance, clearly gave him the freedom to intervene.

According to the ordinance, the commission could:

- Exercise superintendence over the Delhi Special Police Establishment in so far as it relates to the investigation of offences alleged to have been committed under the Prevention of Corruption Act 1988.
- Review the progress of investigation conducted by the Delhi Special Police Establishment into offences alleged to have been committed under the Prevention of Corruption Act 1988.

Both these powers were withdrawn after the ordinance lapsed on 5 April and Parliament collapsed before the CVC Act could be brought in the Parliament. Through a Cabinet resolution, the CVC was granted some administrative powers to ensure continuity, but they were only cosmetic.

"Our statutory status is an outcome of a Supreme Court order that the government agreed to implement. It has nothing to do with politics. So there is no reason why another ordinance cannot be brought in," says Vittal

To be fair to the CVC, his lack of enterprise had more to do with the Supreme Court order of Chief Justice J.S. Verma, S.P. Bharucha and S.C. Sen. The order, as legal experts point out, is replete with infirmities.

The CBI, as a police force of the Union government, is mandated to investigate cognizable offences notified by the central or state government. Its

duty is vitally linked to the administration of justice. The CBI, as the investigative arm of the state, draws its powers from the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, and the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), 1973.

The PC act, 1988 is a self-contained code and it bodily lifts the offences of bribery and corruption from the jurisdiction of ordinary courts and vests in the courts of special judges. The investigation is to be undertaken by senior officials equipped with forensic skills. Under these circumstances, the CVC just cannot interfere in any investigation. "Even if the CVC Act is passed he can do precious little," informed former law minister H.R. Bhargava. "He can only be consulted at the pre-trial stage after the investigation when sanction to prosecute is to be obtained."

To grant or refuse sanction is contingent on the subjective satisfaction of the competent authority and, legal experts insist, cannot be influenced by the CVC or any other authority. Interestingly, PC Act, 1988 specifies the competent authorities that have the power to grant permission. Established laws and precedents, therefore, give little space for manoeuvrability for the CVC. "The directions of the superior courts must confirm to the settled principles of law," insists Bhargava.

The former law minister claims that the SC order did not improve the working of the CBI or the FERA investigations. Even monitoring of the cases by the Supreme Court and high courts disturbed the established investigation and trial of offences. SC, under Chief Justice Verma, chose to monitor many politically sensitive cases like the Havala, Chandra Swami and the others after the impression was created that the probe agencies did not have the will to take the cases to their logical conclusion. Justice Verma tried to devise new ways to push the agencies to carry on with their business of a professional investigation but it did not really work. For a variety of reasons, SC's Havala Bench failed to resolve its dilemma to live up to its grain and be adversarial or break new grounds and be inquisitorial (like the investigating judges in Italy and France). Contemporary history has it that Verma's activism failed to show many results. The Havala scandal, a test case of Justice Verma's contentious initiative, was thrown out by the high court. Justice Verma, who had been monitoring the case, had remarked on several occasions that the

Havala was such a cut-and-dry case that even a 'daroga' could solve it. It was apparent that the judiciary was sharply divided on Verma's handling of the case.

Leaving aside godman Chandra Swami, who got a battering at the hands of the courts, the more well-entrenched of the corrupt and criminal interest faced no problems with the new dispensation put in place by the SC.

The only contribution of the SC order was the delay injected in the decision-making process. The CBI director and ED, according to the new scheme of things, had to be appointed by the CVC with the help of other officers like the home secretary and personnel secretary. The CVC, too, had to be appointed by the government after consulting the leader of the Opposition. Political instability delayed the promulgation of the ordinance and consequently the appoint-



"Even if the CVC Act is passed he can do precious little," says former law minister H.R. Bhargava. "He can only be consulted at the pre-trial stage after the investigation when sanction to prosecute is to be obtained"



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ment of the CVC and 'full time' directors of the investigating agencies. For full one year a sword was hanging on the heads of the CBI's acting director Trinath Misra and ED M.K. Bezbaruah.

Trinath Misra, who conducted the raid on Reliance after the CBI found the company's links with land shark and underworld don Romesh Sharma, was removed immediately after. The ostensible reason forwarded was that the CVC-led committee had found Raghavan as the most qualified candidate. Ironically, Justice Verma, whose order contributed

in Raghavan's elevation, had ordered departmental action against him for administrative lapses in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case. According to informed sources, a PIL is being filed to overturn the CVC committee's recommendation to make him the director, CBI.

Similarly, the highly-rated M.K. Bezbaruah was removed and Inderjit Khanna was appointed in his place. The fundamental question that the whole issue has raised is that, has the new system evolved by the SC order contributed in appoint-

ing better-quality individuals in these sensitive positions? Even though it is too early to pass judgement on the performance of the two agencies under the new officers, there is little to suggest that the organisations are likely to behave very differently. The moot question is what was the need for putting in place such a tortuous and convoluted exercise.

What was, perhaps, needed was the security of tenure for the CBI and ED bosses to ensure that the agencies remain immune from any kind of interference. Contrary to common understanding, it is not always political interference that proves to be the nemesis of the inquiry officers but corporate interests. Susceptibility to exertions from moneybags gets accentuated due to political instability. Both the SC order and the CVC frame of reference failed to countenance this disturbing reality. For some reason, the SC Bench failed to grant security of tenure to the CBI and ED, the cutting edge of any probe. In place, they created a new constitutional entity and endowed it with powers that may cause new institutional conflicts. "What is perhaps needed for effective investigation is will and, perhaps, security of tenure and nothing else," said former CBI director Joginder Singh. He claimed that the agency without the benefit of the new SC order performed better and took a number of cases to their logical conclusion.

Vittal, in all fairness, tried hard to understand the genesis of governmental corruption and took measures too. But for some reason, that failed to make much impact. His fatwa to ban post-tender negotiations and insist on computerisation in banks, although laudable, just could not be implemented.

Vittal claims that the investigation of the CBI and ED was hampered by shortage of staff. According to his finding, the delay in prosecution ranges from 2-35 years and the track-record in investigation too is not sanguine, that is, 2-12 years. Due to the new chain of command, created by the SC order, the 30-per-cent shortfall in staff strength could not be bridged.

Even though Vittal is lobbying hard to get the ordinance re-promulgated, there is no one in the political establishment that wants to give up powers that it derives from the people's mandate. The well-meaning CVC would probably have to wait for the restoration of his lost kingdom for some more time. •

Sanjay Kapoor/New Delhi

Ostrich-like

India remains indifferent to NATO's monstrous war in Serbia



So absorbed are we in the domestic political mess that the country's interest in foreign affairs has plummeted. This may not bother most of us but has hit hard Najam Sethi, the editor of Pakistan's *Friday Times*, who was in New Delhi to deliver a lecture in memory of Kewal Singh, a foreign secretary who had served as high commissioner to Pakistan during the 1965 war.

In his presentation, 'Pakistan in the 21st century', presided over by Inder Gujral, Sethi painted a pessimistic picture and concluded that those describing Pakistan a "failed" or "failing" state could not be blamed.

This provoked the usually suave and soft-spoken Pakistani

But we cannot afford to ignore some disturbing international developments simply because they are taking place in distant areas. The continuing US-led aggression against Yugoslavia, combined with NATO's new doctrine, which makes military alliance an instrument of enforcing America's hegemony, are matters of enormous gravity.

America's war on Yugoslavia was driven by ignoble motives from the word go. To say this is not to condone or overlook the atrocities on the people of Albanian ethnicity in Kosovo by Slobodan Milosevic. However, by now NATO's murderous air strikes on the Serbian people and ironically on the Kosovars have become far more monstrous.

Innocent Serbians, including Kosovars, have been killed "by mistake", according to NATO. The environment has been

AFF

Innocent Serbians, including Kosovars, have been killed "by mistake", according to NATO. More Kosovars have had to flee their homes because of NATO bombing than for any other reason



Children scrambling for bread: victims of NATO's aggression

high commissioner, Ashraf Qazi, into issuing a sharp rejoinder. He called Sethi's lecture "unfairly negative" and "cynical". But the editor stuck to his guns.

At a private gathering later, Sethi expressed surprise at India's disinterest in the outside world. He found it astonishing that Indians, genuinely interested in improving relations with Pakistan, were unaware of the deep Pakistani feelings over Kashmir. To him, nonchalance over Kashmir seemed nothing short of complacency. He was told that India was indeed self-absorbed and that the apparent indifference on Kashmir was a mark of confidence that the Indian security forces could deal with whatever Pakistan might try to do in the sensitive state.

There was a lot worth noting in what Sethi had to say, but my purpose here is not to go over them.

Instead, I want to hammer home that we cannot opt out of the world. If we want to safeguard our security and interests and pull our weight in the international community we have to get involved in world affairs. Surely, we must be better informed about what is going on in Pakistan and China, the two neighbours of the greatest importance, with both of whom we must work for friendly and cooperative relations.

poisoned by attacks on refineries, chemical plants, etc. More Kosovars have had to flee their homes because of NATO bombing than for any other reason. And NATO's local collaborators are thugs of the Kosovo Liberation Army, previously denounced by the United States as a terrorist organisation.

To compound all this, NATO, at the dictates of the American champions of free flow of information and freedom of expression, has been destroying Serbian television and radio. This is censorship by bombing at a time when CNN and BBC are churning out NATO war propaganda round the clock.

The rest of the world, thanks to unipolarity, appears helpless. Russia, historically the closest friend of the Serbs and having high stakes in the Balkans, is outraged but unable to do anything. Its attempts to broker a solution are being snubbed by the arrogant Western powers.

Unfortunately, nothing has been heard from New Delhi. Our criticism may not be able to stem the rising tide of NATO aggressiveness. But we must speak up. Especially now that we are told that the present government is not a "caretaker" but a "full-fledged" one. •



Brick Lane after the 26 April explosion

Shattered!

Racist attacks on minority communities in London have blown the lid off a sense of security they had been lulled into

The time: 6.30 pm. The day: Friday, 30 April. The Place: Old Compton Street, Soho. The Mood: joyous. And why not? It's the eve of Bank Holiday weekend (a traditional three-day break coinciding with May Day). The sun shone bright as hordes of young men and women headed for their favourite hang-outs in the heart of London's pleasure zone. The city was ready to party through the next few days and nights.

Ten minutes later, the Soho street resembled a war zone — thick smoke billowing out of a popular gay pub, victims bathed in blood and covered with burns, dismembered limbs, shattered glass ... A bomb had just exploded in the crowded confines of Admiral Duncan.

As word spread like only word of doom can, large parts of the city inhabited by The Minorities were gripped by fear. For this was the third blast in two weeks and there was a horrific common factor: they had all been aimed at pet neo-

Nazi targets. Blacks, Asians, and now gays.

The first part of the terror trilogy was enacted on the evening of 19 April. At 5.30 pm that Saturday, a nail bomb kept

The succession of weekend nail bombings in London have shredded the social fabric of a city that prides itself on its cosmopolitan character

in a sports bag rocked a crowded street market in Brixton, the 'black capital' of London. Thirty-eight people were injured in the blast, most of them hit by flying splinters and nails. Exactly a week later,

at 5.57 pm on Saturday, 26 April, another nail bomb, in a sports bag, exploded in Brick Lane, home to the Bangladeshi community and a hugely-popular address for all those seeking the culinary delights of the East. Six people were injured, with the city left wondering, where next?

The brutal answer came 24 hours earlier than feared: Soho, the nerve centre of London's night life. And this time, the damage was devastating. Three people were killed and 73 others injured (19 critically) when a bomb stuffed with nails and screws, hidden in a sports bag, blew up the Admiral Duncan pub. "This is worse than anything I have ever seen before in London," confessed Prof. Gus McGrouther, a plastic surgeon at the University College Hospital. "They have suffered the worst of burn and blast injuries with large nails, screws, glass etc. embedded in their bodies."

The morning after the third blast, the Metropolitan Police arrested a young man from Cove in Hampshire. On 3

May, 22-year-old David James Copeland was accused of killing three people and injuring 117 in three separate blasts and remanded in custody for a week. The police made it clear that Copeland was "working alone" and was "not linked" with neo-Nazi organisations like Combat 18 (the number derived from the first letters of Adolf Hitler's name) and the White Wolves (a faction of C-18).

The succession of weekend nail bombings in London have shredded the social fabric of a city that prides itself on its cosmopolitan character. It has hurled up several disturbing, even damaging, questions about the life and times of London today. "This is the ugliest face of racism I have seen. It is symptomatic of the backlash against the Stephen Lawrence inquiry," observed Labour MP Oona King under whose constituency Brick Lane falls. Incidentally, the inquiry into the brutal murder of Lawrence, a young black man, by white youths in April '93, has focussed on 'institutionalised racism' in the police force and attracted a lot of attention. King, a black political leader, was among those who had received hate mail just before the first blast.

"Notice is hereby given that all non-Whites & Jews (defined by blood, not religion) must permanently leave The British Isles before the year is out. Jews and non-Whites who remain after 1999 has ended will be exterminated. When the clock strikes midnight on 31.12.99, the White Wolves will begin to howl, and when the wolves begin to howl, the wolves begin to hunt. You have been warned. Hail Britannia!" read a statement by the Command Council of the White Wolves which was distributed to several Black, Asian and Jewish organisations. The threat was later extended to "all aliens" (including the gay community).

After every blast, both Combat 18 and White Wolves were quick to claim responsibility and warned that more will follow. So, it was a fortnight of fear for 'the outsiders' — residing between Brixton and Birmingham, Southall and Glasgow. But then, nothing unites like fear, as they say. "A few right-wing extremists who are obviously racist and homophobic will not be able to cause divisions in our society. These terrible outrages have, in fact, brought the different groups closer together," declared home secretary Jack Straw.

The Bangladeshi restaurants of Brick

Lane picked up the pieces and got back to 'business as usual' within a day of the blast. The Sikhs of Southall remained vigilant (quickly forming a Monitoring Group) but made sure that the normal routine was not upset. The gay community was more vocal and demonstrative. The Anti-Nazi League organised protest

the local community," says Shofique Choudhury of the Bangladeshi Welfare Association. "The police here is not really bothered about the ethnic minorities. They refuse to act, they only react. And the politicians are busy gathering Brownie Points with grand shows of solidarity. It is up to us to protect ourselves,"

■ **PRINCE CHARLES:** "I am extremely distressed and shocked ... [but] the important thing is to realise that these are not just attacks on particular communities, but on all of us."

■ **KUMAR MURSHID, chairman of the National Assembly Against Racism:** "Why are Combat 18 and other groups like that not illegal? They clearly exist to incite violence and they should be banned."

■ **SIDDY SHIVDASANI, editor, Eastern Eye:** "These attacks have exposed the institutionalised incompetence of the police force. The people, especially the minority groups, must be more vigilant, aware and alert."



PRINCE CHARLES

■ **TONY BLAIR:** "The true outcasts today, the true minorities, are not the different races and religions of Britain but the racists, the bombers, the violent criminals who hate the vision of a tolerant, multi-racial Britain and try to destroy it. They shall not win."

■ **SURESH GROVER, head, Southall Monitoring Project:** "We need to make our presence felt through self-organisation, self-reliance and self-restraint to counter racial terrorism."



TONY BLAIR

rallies to urge "Black & White Unite" to create a "Nazi-Free Zone".

And the call might not be totally unjustified. The havoc caused by a "lone wolf" could well serve as a blueprint of terror for vicious neo-Nazi groups in and around London. What the blasts have done is blow the lid off the sense of security that the minority groups had been lulled into over the last few years of quiet. For one, the role of the Metropolitan "working for a safer London" Police has come under a cloud. "They have been negligent in their efforts to protect

warns young Jai of Southall.

For Indians living in London, the recent racist attacks have not only had a direct effect on their lifestyles (attendance at eateries in 'sensitive' areas has dropped over the last few weekends), but also on the view of life. As an elderly man, living in Southall for the last two years with his son's family, put it: "These attacks have reminded us about the precariousness of our existence. These are the times when you realise that this is no home away from home." •

Sanku Des Gupta/London

More and more companies are discovering that it helps to send the message across

JUST ADD

It happens every morning. Somewhere near the main thoroughfare which carries backfiring trucks and belching lorries through Haryana, a small platform plays a melodious tune, attracting a motley crowd of 150 people. They listen to a reworked version of *Chhaiya chhaiya* from Mani Ratnam's film *Dil Se*. But the song also conveys a message: about the use of disposable syringes manufactured by the Ahmedabad-based Nuchem Laboratories.

Music is possibly the most effective medium of brand communication in India. "Music calls. And music sells," remarks Ashok Rajput, member of Bhavna, a non-governmental organisation holding a camp for more than three months at Gurgaon, educating pregnant women about the advantages of using disposable syringes.

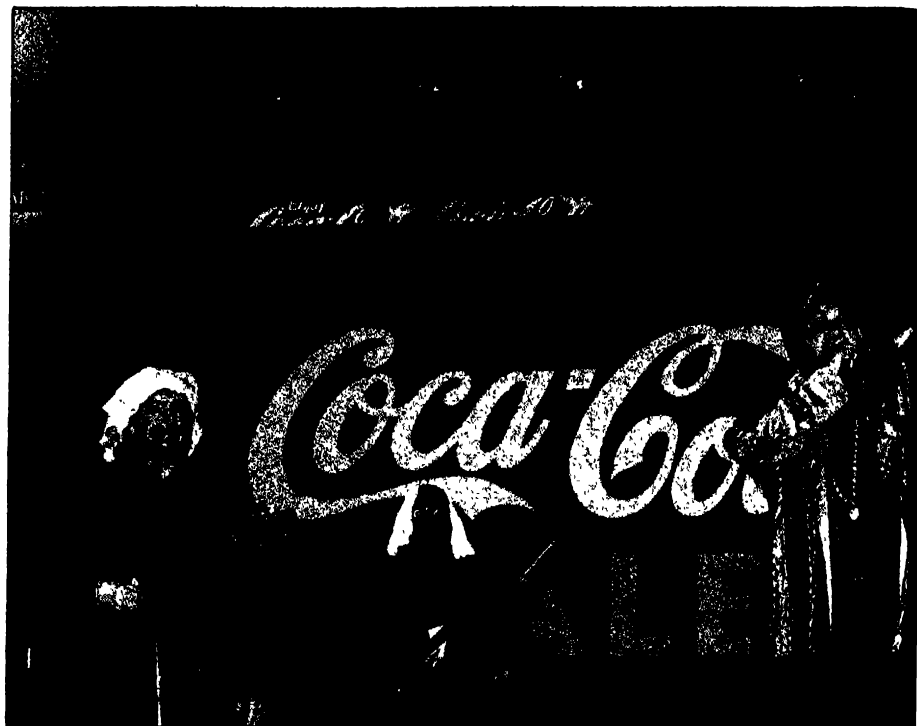
A complete contrast is the swanky glass-panelled office of Sanjiv Gupta, vice-president (marketing) of Coca-Cola, also in Gurgaon. Displayed on a board next to his study is a pin-up of Daler Mehndi, the Punjabi pop star with a bottle of Coke.

According to Gupta, Coca-Cola India has launched a campaign involving stars like Asha Bhonsle, Daler Mehndi, Raageshwari and Diane King. King has already performed in five cities and Mehndi has had a 30-city tour in the past four months.

Welcome to the world of personal marketing, which is currently ruling the subcontinent's Rs 7,000-crore fast moving consumer goods industry. And that too with a tinge of music (read entertainment). Savvy marketers and research associates are calling it the easiest way to reach a consumer's mind.

The process is not too laborious. Identify markets, potential customers and their behavioural patterns. Add music and the rest will fall in place. That's called smart brand building.

The list of companies is quite long: Hindustan Lever Limited, Proctor & Gamble, Maruti, ICI, Glaxo India, Citi-

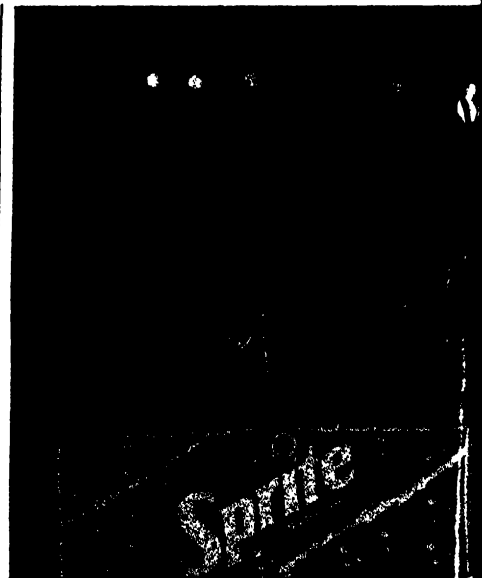


Daler Mehndi singing for Coca-Cola: direct appeal

bank, JK Tyres, Apollo Tyres...and a host of television and radio channels. "Music helps because it is much more direct and enables us to do some excellent branding for our clients," remarks Nitin Jain, media director of Hindustan Thompson Associates.

Experts say this is the best way to retain brand loyalty in various segments, considering the fact that the market is increasingly getting fragmented. Says Santosh Desai, senior executive vice-president (strategic planning and consumer insight), McCann Erickson India, "Music is refreshing. And along with it comes entertainment that would draw many. So more and more companies are trying to develop this as a useful mode of communication."

Recent studies by agencies like McCann Erickson, Indian Market Research Bureau, Mode, Indica Research and ORG Marg reflect a steady customer shift towards anything that is packaged with a musical tinge and is entertaining. "At home, more and more people are watching entertainment-based programmes. While out on the streets, any

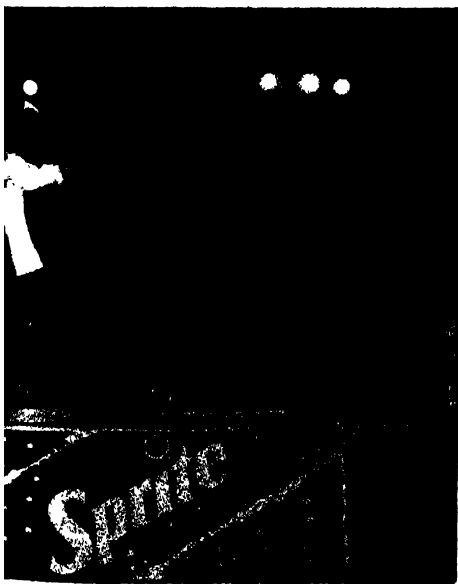
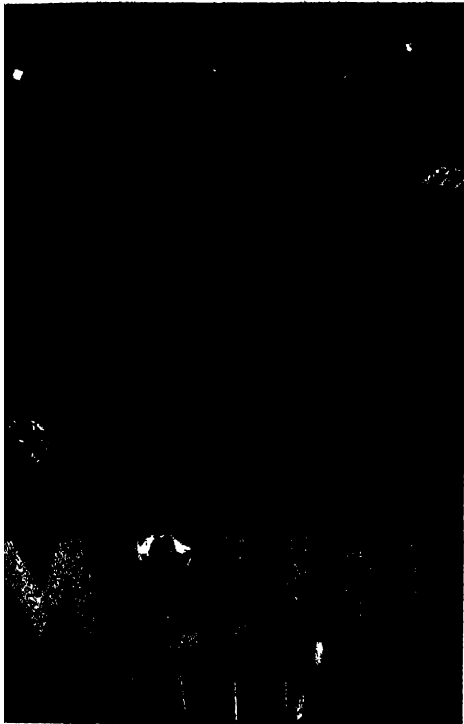


The Mehndi-Sprite Show: attracting an audio 10

product that comes with a bit of relationship marketing and music is welcomed," Desai points out.

According to Vibha Paul Rishi, vice-president, marketing, Pepsi Co. India,

MUSIC



22,000

music undoubtedly has helped develop Pepsi as a popular brand among the youth across the subcontinent because the target audience has tried to link the product to its tunes, especially ones like

Yehi hai right choice baby...Aha.

"For example, if you notice the Shah Rukh Khan and the dog campaign you would notice that we have ended with an *aha* only because of its tremendous recall value," says Rishi. For the FM channel in New Delhi, Pepsi has launched two youth-oriented programmes: *Pepsi out of the blue* and *Mirinda char baje band baje*.

D.K. Bose, president, O&M (Rural), says such marketing helps the customer understand the brand image of the product for almost a lifetime and buy the product year after year. "And this works wonders in the rural belt where music spells magic."

But isn't music and its connection with consumer goods as old as the hills?

"Yes, but today it's being used in so many ways that helps you garner almost

the campaign, *Piti kya Coca-Cola*, helped the soft drink giant score major points in brand development. "Brand promotion that comes with music is interesting. Some are linked to film music while some are developing their own lyrics and tunes. Such trends will help the market grow fast in the future," says Sameer Verma, GM Amirati Puris Lintas.

And thanks to the demand for branded musical programmes on FM, AIR has started looking for an estimated daily turnover of Rs 10 lakh to Rs 15 lakh from Delhi, Calcutta, Mumbai, Goa and Chennai. A similar scenario is emerging in television as well. "Look at the number of music-based programmes and countdown shows on the channels. And it's not happening because it's affordable to produce such shows, it's a desperate attempt to retain viewership," says Sajal Mukherjee, vice-president, media, Rediffusion DY&R Brand Communications.

Data reveal a shift from news to entertainment. The fact that news bulletins like *Aaj Tak*, once relatively high on the charts, are not even among the top ten grossers of DD2 and is on its way out

Coca-Cola India has launched a campaign involving stars like Asha Bhonsle, Daler Mehndi, Raageshwari and Diane King. King has performed in five cities and Mehndi has had a 30-city tour

80 per cent of your revenue," says Irfan Khan, general manager, corporate communications, HLL, India's largest advertiser. The consumer goods giant has picked up almost all prime-time slots in Mumbai for FM broadcast.

"After all, Mumbai is a city where people drive for very long hours alone. We realised that we could use the radio to convey interesting messages. And this has fantastic potential because we are essentially targeting those people for our brands. Our programmes on FM are a hit in small shops which stock our products," adds Khan. HLL has preferred morning slots in Mumbai FM for hour-long family programmes to promote some of its popular brands.

Many are calling music a natural ally of what is increasingly being referred to as relationship marketing. For example,

(as sources suggest) shows that news is not exciting for all.

Today, people prefer short capsules of news that tells you all. And the rest is entertainment. After all, the CNN culture of round-the-clock news is yet to catch up in India. Industry analysts say today's specialised marketing methods have opened up new vistas for both the companies and the consumers. In addition, agencies are increasingly doing their own proprietary research. "The consumer today is much more focused and can actually understand the pulse of the market," sums up an industry source.

The consequence: the manufacturing companies need to read the pulse of the consumer and create strategies that synchronise with their feet-tapping rhythms. •

Devdatta Dasgupta/New Delhi

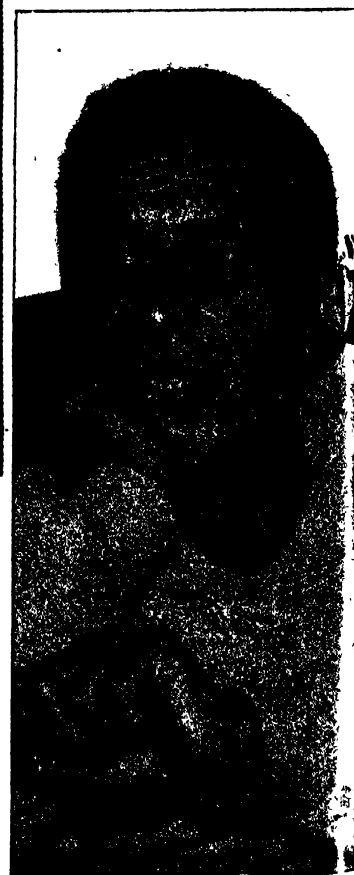
Some people undress for wages; some do it — well, almost! — for pure fun. At the recently held Bollywood Nite show in London, our homegrown stud **Salman Khan** (also known as the take-off-his-shirt-at-the-slightest-pretext legend) went a millennial step forward: he doffed his pants. Here's the sequence. While swaying to the tunes of *O, O, Jane Jana*, Salman first threw off his jacket. Not content, he then peeled off his trousers. Response: giggling teenage girls whistled and catcalled howling for more as Salman, now down to hip-hugging black underwear, rollicked on stage. Not everyone was pleased though. "The pelvic gyrations were vulgar. I'm afraid he went completely overboard," said one conservative onlooker. The best sum-up, however, came from an excited fan who obviously liked what was on show: "Male stripping is alive and well. This is a big boost for the future of the Chippendales." At least, it's better than killing endangered black bucks.

OF BRIEFS AND BODY BASICS



IT'S CHARACTER

Wily looks don't necessarily make you a good villain — you need guts as well. We say Bollywood baddie **Paresh Rawal** has guts aplenty. Rawal will be playing the role of Nathuram Godse, the Hindu fanatic who shot Gandhiji, in the Hindi version of Pradeep Dalvi's controversial and banned Marathi play *Mee Nathuram Godse Boltoy. Gandhi Godse*, the Hindi version which is being advertised in the US as a 'powerful drama banned in India', will tour American cities late next month. Rawal, the only known face in the cast,



CELEBRITY TIFF

Naseeruddin Shah, the lead performer in **Feroz Khan's** (left) *Making Of The Mahatma*, has decided to walk out of the play, just when the director thought it was time to take it abroad. Reason: he says he wasn't getting enough! Apparently, Khan isn't the only one miffed with him. The latest to be disenchanted with his eccentricities is **Aamir Khan** who, watchers claim, had a tough time during the making of *Sarfarosh*. If nothing else, it was bad timing. Or good, depending on whose side you are.

R I'M INTERESTED IN



says putting Nathuram's Tihar jail uniform didn't make him nervous. "For me it's a character in which I am interested in as an actor," he told reporters. "There is no political ideology or philosophy which I cater

to nor do I have a soft corner for any political party." The real gainer should be the play's producer: catchy promotional stunts like that generally have people rioting outside ticket counters.

HANG ON TO YOUR MOOD, RUBY

Nobody likes to see celebrity marriages break up. They are usually messy affairs and blind, idolising fans get a whiff that all's not well behind the shimmering facade. Telegenic veejay-cum-model-turned-actress **Ruby Bhatia** concedes that her divorce with husband **Nitin Bal** has been a humbling experience. But the woman with the Midas touch (except when it comes to marital longevity) has,

unlike her less famous ex-spouse, bounced back with a vengeance-filled bang. She has been offered roles in a couple of serials. Last heard, Ruby was also planning on a bit of journalistic excursion. "I plan to do a couple of columns for magazines and newspapers," she says. Hang on to your post-break-up mood, Ruby. We promise to read what you write.



Yamini

ARC OF FLOWERING GENIUS

Sixteen-year-old Kuchipudi dancer Yamini Reddy gave her debut performance in Delhi recently. It was near flawless. Her artistry, we discovered, flows in her genes:

ALL IN THE FAMILY

Yamini is the offspring of the celebrated Kuchipudi trio, Radha-Raja-Kaushalya Reddy. She's Radha's daughter. It's a funny set-up. Radha and Kaushalya are sisters and both married to the guy in the middle. But since they don't have any problems, it's no skin off our back either

FIRST SIGNS OF INTEREST

She was two-and-a-half-years old when a bowl of *chandan* (sandal) attracted her. Interest in dance followed soon. Her stepmom Kaushalya says Yamini loved applying the sandal paste they prepared before a performance

PARENTS AS TUTORS

"It was different," says Kaushalya. (Yamini is more attached to her.) "We taught her what she wanted to learn." One reason, perhaps, why she bloomed early.



AVINASH PASRICHA

AVINASH PASRICHA

A FISTFUL OF

The entry of Hollywood giant Columbia TriStar into Hindi filmdom may change the face of Bollywood

You've heard Arnold Schwarzenegger take on his adversaries in *shudh* Hindi. But this is one better. Hollywood giant Columbia TriStar aka Sony Pictures Entertainment, India has marched right into the heartland of Bombay's *filmi duniya*. It has acquired the global distribution rights for Hindi film *Pyar Mein Kabhi Kabhi*, starring newcomers Dino Morea and Rinke Khanna. After invading the psyche of a Hindi-speaking audience by spawning American blockbusters dubbed in Hindi, Hollywood seems all set to conquer their hearts by presenting a purely *desi* romance of the college campus variety.

It all began with the central government's inviting foreign investment for the Indian film industry. In March this year, the Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB), headed by information and broadcasting minister Pramod Mahajan, cleared several proposals, including those by Columbia TriStar Films, to make movies in India. In fact, Columbia was among the firsts to submit a proposal to the FIPB over eight months ago.

The possibilities are of Titanic dimensions. It could just be a matter of time before Shah Rukh Khan works under the Columbia TriStar banner or Mani Ratnam is asked to direct a film for 20th Century Fox. At the moment, Columbia is the only Hollywood studio out to make the most of the world's most prolific film industry. Other Hollywood biggies still seem to be measuring the ground before plunging in. Warner Brothers, for one, refused to comment on their future plans. Sabarjit Singh, general manager, Paramount Films, India says: "We have



no plans to produce films in India." Aditya Shastri of 20th Century Fox, which had marketed Dev Benegal's *English August* says that the film was an exception. "We are not equipped with [the requisite] production skills in India. Moreover, we do not believe in implementing half-baked ideas. We would much rather wait and watch."

Meanwhile, Columbia, afraid to ruffle feathers in a film industry they have just stepped into, is holding its policy cards close to its chest, not ready to disclose anything about investment amounts or Indian tie-ups yet. Even inno-

***Pyar Mein Kabhi Kabhi* Columbia TriStar's first Indian venture is a celebration of raw talents**

cuous details about its game plan cannot be talked about. With the exception of *PMKK*, its first venture into Hindi films.

Says Uday Singh, director, Sony Pictures Entertainment, India: "We chose the movie as our first vehicle as we were impressed with the director's work and also confident about the film's success." Now midway through a focussed and aggressive marketing campaign, the film is slated for a post-World Cup worldwide release on 25 June. "The fact

DOLLARS



SHAKTI KUMAR



UDAY SINGH

"We chose *PMKK* as our first vehicle as we were impressed with the director's work and also confident about the film's success"

that Columbia is distributing it is of great prestige to us and lends credibility to our film," says an exultant Shailendra Singh, producer, *PMKK*.

But the rest of Bollywood is not all that ecstatic. Says veteran film producer-director Shakti Samanta who is also the president of the Indian Motion Pictures Producers Association (IMPPA): "We have reasons to be worried; we cannot say when they [Hollywood film companies] will pose a threat. With their money power, they will try and capture the entire film industry." IMPPA, he says, will soon take up the issue. Exhibitor Shyam Shroff has similar fears.

"Sony has deep pockets — it can produce 20 *Kuch Kuch Hota Hais*. They even have enough money to throw around — this can eliminate small-time producers, directors or distributors." He feels the government should have taken the film industry into confidence before taking this decision.

Film-maker Subhash Ghai seems reconciled to the fact that foreign investment in Indian film industry was waiting to happen, in the post economic reforms era. "If Coke, Pepsi and Hyundai can enter India why not Columbia? They need talent, our industry needs funds and organised growth. If we can form a

comfortable working equation — without losing our dignity and cultural values, then why not?" Mahesh Bhatt too, is optimistic. In his opinion, this will soon change the face of the Bombay film industry, the way satellite television has transformed the television entertainment industry. In director Karan Johar's opinion, Columbia's entry would "kick-start a mini revolution". "We'll now have new trends and attitudes," he predicts. "The entry of foreign film companies reflects on the power of Indian cinema."

While some prefer to 'wait and watch' before more details emerge from Sony's stable about their future game plan, some are plain indifferent. "Things are not likely to change in the film industry, at least not for another 50 years. Sony's entry will not make much of a difference," asserts N.N. Sippy, president of Indian Motion Picture Distributors Association. Financer Bharat Shah echoes similar sentiments. In fact, he is worried about Sony's future, the reason being: "Most of the big directors are themselves producers — Yash Chopra, Subhash Ghai, Raj Kumar Santoshi, Mani Ratnam, Ram Gopal Varma. Why should they join Sony? That leaves mainly the new directors. I wish them luck."

Distributor U.A. Thadani feels it's only logical that foreign film companies invest in India, considering the revenue they earn annually from marketing their home-grown movies here. He says that there is a definite crossover taking place. For instance, a lot of Hindi film audiences are going to see *Titanic* even in the original version. Trade pundits peg the English films' market in India at around Rs 50 crore. "As of now, English film watchers constitute only 12 to 15 per cent of the market but the prospects of growth are enormous. In fact, *Titanic* was one of the biggest hits in the hit-starved industry last year," says trade pundit Amod Mehra.

Last year, the institution of Indian films was awarded industry status by the Sushma Swaraj-led I&B ministry among much fanfare. But Bollywood is yet to reap the benefits of the move, claims Ghai. "Even after being accorded



SUBHASH GHAI

"If Coke, Pepsi and Hyundai can enter India why not Columbia? They need talent, our industry needs funds and organised growth"



MAHESH BHATT

"Columbia's entry will create more job opportunities. Specialisation of activities will lead to better concentration and a better product"



KARAN JOHAR

"Instead of the usual *gheesa pita* formulas, we can now expect movies with fresh storylines, made with superior technology"

an industry status, none of the banks are willing to finance our movies; maybe because of the risk involved. Neither the government nor the media has done much to help us," he laments. Borrowing money from the market, he says, works out to be very expensive. "But if Sony came in, interest rates would fall."

Producer G.P. Sippy says that Sony couldn't have entered at a better time; when majority of films are flopping and the film finance is in doldrums. "Their entry could rejuvenate our film industry." It will be the producers, he contends, who will be the biggest beneficiaries from this move since there won't be any dilly-dallying in payments.

Says K.D. Shorey, general secretary of Film Makers' Combine as well as Film Federation of India: "Bollywood is passing through a very disturbing phase for the last two years. Only four stars — the three Khans, Shah Rukh, Aamir, Salman and Govinda — sell. For films which do not have a star cast, there are absolutely no buyers, distributors or audience." Kokal Nahata, editor of *Film Information*, analyses: "It is a vicious circle. The exhibitor and theatre owners want only the top stars. The distributor then naturally wants to buy territories of only those films which have stars in them. The producer follows suit. Stars, as a result, have to work on five to six films simultaneously. This causes unnecessary delay and hampers cash flow."

Which shows why Hindi film stars refuse to be bound by contracts or, for that matter, are unpunctual on the film sets. It is a fact that the largest film-producing country in the world — 695 films annually — works on the basis of personal relations and word of mouth, professionalism taking a backseat. So would a Hollywood studio with its professional set-up — stars on contract, schedule-bound scripts, planning sheets — be able to function here? Rauf Ahmed, editor of *Premiere*, is optimistic. "Columbia's entry will bring in some semblance of professionalism, some discipline in this very unorganised region."

Mahesh Bhatt's prediction is that Columbia's entry will generate stiff competition in the Bombay film industry which in turn will sharpen survival instincts. "The move will also create more job opportunities since, after all, they will be using Indian actors and technicians." Besides, there would be specialisation of activities — skilled professionals will tackle specific assignments.



"With work-load getting divided, it will lead to better concentration and ultimately, a better product."

Johar feels that the over-all quality of films will improve. "Instead of the usual *gheesa pita* (hackneyed) formulas in our Hindi films — which is one of the reasons why they are being thoroughly rejected by our audiences — we can now expect movies with fresh storylines and made with superior technology. They will also nurture our creative talents as well as improve our technical expertise." Moreover, says Johar, the Hindi film market will burgeon; we'll have a larger and a global audience.

On the flip side, however, Johar feels that it could also play havoc on individual creativity. "As is prevalent in Hollywood, the script would be controlled by a committee. Our industry has had great and finest film-makers — there is nothing in the world that is quite like Raj Kapoor or Guru Dutt's films, or even Yash Chopra movies," he contends.

Columbia's choice of its first acquisition has gladdened many hearts. *PMKK* is a celebration of raw talents. It is producer Shailendra Singh's and 20-something director Raj Kaushal's



A definite crossover among the audience is on. A lot of Hindi film audiences are going to see *Titanic* (above) in the original version. *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun* (left) grossed over Rs 150 crore, globally

first feature film. The members of the cast are all debuting, as are the music director, the lyricists and the singers. Says N. Muthu Ram, marketing manager, SPE Films, India: "Sony's association with the film is in keeping with our global policy to promote new, upcoming talent." Kaushal goes a step further in predicting boom time for fresh talented youngsters: "Like us, new talents will now have an advantage with Sony's entry (Sony's second acquisition, *Jadh* is also directed by first-timer Shantanu Sheorey). So will small-budget films, which earlier found no willing producers or distributors." Agrees Shroff whose Shrinagar Films distributed Nagesh Kukunoor's off-beat hit *Hyderabad Blues*: "It will definitely encourage small-time experimental film-makers like Kukunoor or Kaizad Gustad."

With Hindi films doing extremely well overseas, — *Dil To Pagal Hai*, *Dil Se*, *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge*, *Kuch Kuch Hota hai*, *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun* — Rauf feels Columbia will have a large market both within India and outside. "When *HAHK* globally grossed over Rs 150 crores, they realised the potential of our movies. While a successful Hindi movie would generally gross over Rs 20

to 25 crore, with a truly global market and audience, we would be talking in terms of Rs 100 crore."

But how is Columbia going to fare in the big bad world of Bollywood? And, will it be able to stick it out? "It depends on how they are going to do it. They have the expertise, technique and even the infrastructure. But the Indian film market's requirements are different. What works in the North may not work in the South," says Rauf. But then, as Nahata predicts; "Let us have no delusions that they are here to make serious songless films as in Hollywood. They are here to make money by producing good commercial Hindi films."

Agrees Ghai: "I would feel peaceful and secure with the knowledge that there is a financially-strong organisation backing and protecting me, in case my film flops. If I am offered to direct an English film on lucrative terms, then I see no reason not to do it."

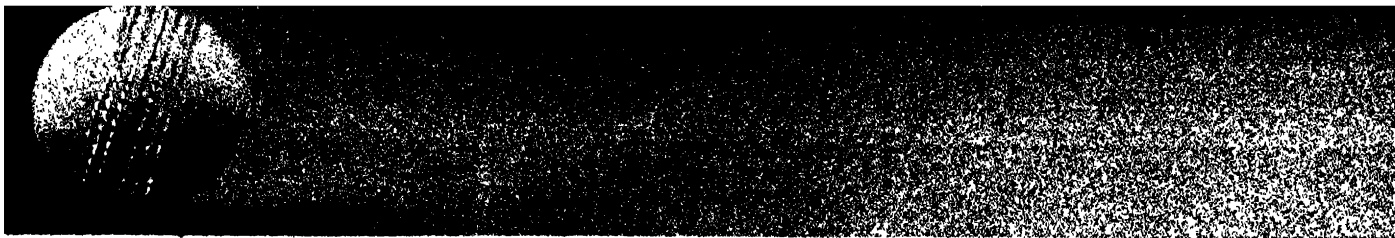
Sony has other business ventures in the entertainment industry — Sony Entertainment Television and Sony Music which ventured into Hindi film music with *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*. Bharat

Shah has it that Sony is entering the Indian film market to feed its television and music companies. "We have had Indian music companies like Tips and Venus producing films as well, but they have not been successful."

According to trade pundits, a lot would depend on how fast Columbia develops its infrastructure. "At present, they have distribution offices only in Bombay and Madras. For Delhi they are relying on a local distributor. This, when Delhi and northern India are their major markets. They need to open distribution offices in every major centre in the country," says Mehra. Distributor Shrivani Shroff says that Sony has not been able to wipe out the local big distributors in non-English markets worldwide. "Ground level distribution networks are hard to set up. So I foresee buy-outs. But the advantage will be that they will stimulate the over-all growth of the market."

Film industry watchers are eagerly awaiting to check out how those men from the land of the Big Apple adjust to that of *Batata Vadas*. Or, more importantly, survive it. •

Kaushal Wadia/Bombay



The Cup tha

India puts its best foot forward

IT WAS 40 DEGREES in India when the Indian team left for the World Cup. It was 13 degrees in England when they arrived here. The team moved straight to the Stakis Hotel in their host city, Leicester. The hotel, just off the busy M1 motorway, was apparently chosen to keep away the crowds that might come thronging if they stayed in a city-centre hotel. For the main purpose of the team was to get their heads down and practise.

"For the first two days, the weather was so bad that we had to work out indoors," coach Anshuman Gaekwad told SUNDAY. But as soon as the rain stopped, the team was out there at the Grace Road Cricket Ground, home of Leicestershire County Cricket, getting the crucial net practice. Luckily, the sun followed the Indian team and England got its first spell of welcome spring sunshine immediately after. "The weather is very good now, and it is very comfortable," said Gaekwad, who is intent on getting all the practice he can before the crucial tournament begins.

Kapil Dev and Mohinder Amarnath with the Prudential Cup in '83: will history repeat itself?



Sachin Tendulkar: world's best



ASHOKE CHAKRABARTY

World Cup '99

t Cheers

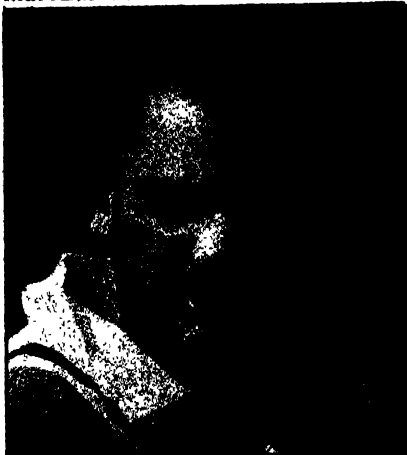


PTI



The defeat at Sharjah has not lowered the morale of the Indians. They just want to concentrate on their practice and do what they have come here to do: win the World Cup

Md. Azharuddin: old war horse



ASHOK CHAKRABARTY

Anil Kumble: spin doctor



ASHOK CHAKRABARTY

Sourav Ganguly: Mr Elegant



ASHOK CHAKRABARTY

Cricket carnival

It's fun time. Both on and off the field

The final touches were being given to Lords. The new futuristic media gallery — called The Spaceship — was ready to accommodate 250 journalists and broadcasters from the 12 participating countries. The press facilities we are also being finalised in the new press pavilion where about 800 journalists would have filing facilities.

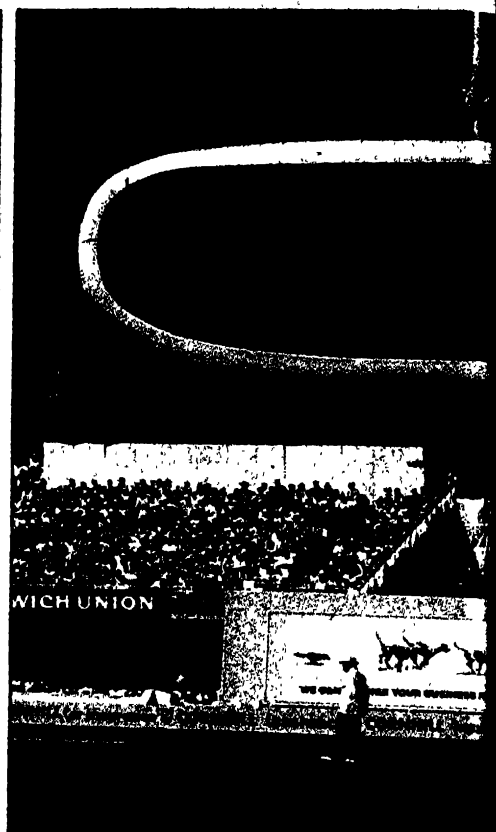
Bathed in the gentle May sunshine, the grounds looked almost tranquil, quite belying the energy and action that one would see in the days to come. Michael Browning, World Cup events manager, got a call early in the morning from an obscure newspaper in a small town in Australia, whose correspondent had not got accreditation, and who had threatened

all hell if he was denied it. "It's all in a day's work," said Browning. "We're getting there."

But though 90 per cent of the tickets for the 42 matches at 22 different venues have already been sold out, World Cup fever seems to be considerably less here than it is in the subcontinent. In England, football is the game that stirs the masses and attracts sponsors and big money. Cricket is considerably lower in the popularity scales.

The World Cup organisers have tried to project the event as a "carnival of cricket" to attract a cross-section of the community to it. But the enthusiasm on the surface level is not visible. The organisers are also running

Indian fans



The new media centre at Lord's

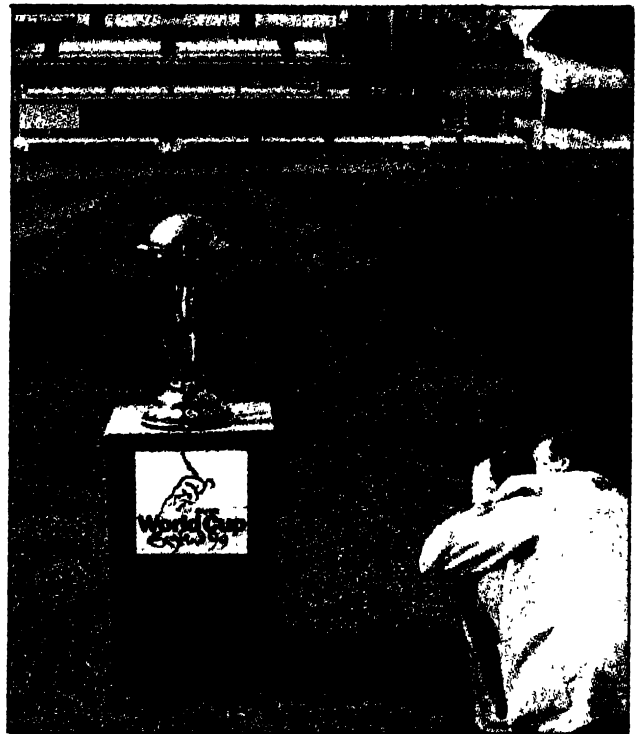
"The World Cup will deliver 17 million pound to the ICC and individual playing countries will get ten times what they have got before. The end result for the England and Wales Cricket Board will be a surplus of 11-12 million pound" — Michael Browning

an ongoing battle against those companies in India which have climbed on the World Cup bandwagon to promote their goods. Notices have been issued to Samsung and Britannia among others.



As the team trooped in for their afternoon practice at the cricket grounds, the mood was confident. "It's going very well," said Sachin Tendulkar, who knows that so much depends on him. And what about his back? "It's fine. No problems now," said the cricketer rated as one of the best batsmen in the world.

Tendulkar will be opening the series with Sourav Ganguly. Gaekwad said it was natural that the Indian team depended heavily on Tendulkar because he was such a "great contributor" to the game, but it was not a one-man show. "There are Sourav, Azhar, Dravid, Jadeja, all these guys also have a lot to contribute. If the total is 300, Sachin would have made 130, the others have also scored. A lot of it is media hype that makes it seem like he is the only one. And the problem with this is that it puts a lot of pressure on Sachin as well," said Gaekwad. "Of course, team morale



The World Cup on display at Lord's

falls if Sachin gets out early, but in the championship in Dhaka, Sachin got out early but the team continued and beat Pakistan. So it is teamwork really."

While Gaekwad does the formal coaching, the team also has a consultant in Bobby Simpson, who is advising the team on certain aspects like running between the wickets, bowling and fielding.

With former World Cup player Brijesh Patel as team manager, the team is also getting an extra helping hand from Patel who knows English cricket conditions well. "Mine is an administrative job, but being a cricketer helps," said Patel modestly. "I know the conditions here and if the team feels the need, I am here to advise them. The team is in top form. They've got good practice and

Did you know that...

LOGISTICS

- During the six-week tournament, over 75 tonnes of grass will be mown at the 21 host venues
- Over 2,500 man-hours will be spent mowing the outfield of the 21 host venues
- The competing teams will be provided with close to 10,000 items of clothing
- The largest competing team is Zimbabwe who has ordered seven extra extra large and eight extra large shirts for the 15-man squad. Bangladesh is the smallest

PLAYERS

- The oldest player competing in the World Cup is Scotland's Iain Phillip



Shahid Afridi

who will be 42 on 9 June. The youngest player is Pakistan's Shahid Afridi who has just turned 19 (d.o.b. 1.3.80).

• This will be Arjuna Ranatunga's fifth cricket World Cup. He first appeared in the 1983 tournament, aged 20.

• The fastest bowler in the tournament is Shoaib Akhtar (Pakistan) who has been clocked at 96 mph. Allan Donald (South Africa) is second at 93 mph. England's Darren Gough is third at 92.5 mph

MEDIA

- The official photographic agency, Allsport, will take over 60,000 photographs during the six-week tournament
- The agency will also use over 5,000 feet of film
- Host broadcasters Sky and BBC will have over 45 commentators covering the 42 matches
- The World Cup will be broadcast in up to

Allan Donald



120 countries to a cumulative audience of two billion

THE TOURNAMENT

- Around 500,000 people will attend World Cup matches this summer
- The total prize money of US\$ 1 million is the most ever offered
- The World Cup Trophy is valued at pound 27,000 and weighs over 11 kilos
- Around 500,000 children aged 8-13 have taken part in the World Cup Education Programme sponsored by global partner Pepsi

HISTORICAL FACTS

- The game of cricket is believed to have started as far back as the 13th century as a game in which country boys bowled a stone at a tree stump or the hurdle gate

they've played some matches, the weather is good, and they are ready to go."

The defeat at Sharjah, he said, had not lowered their morale. "There is winning and losing in cricket, but they are not thinking of the past now," said Patel. On how it will be to play favourites South Africa in the first match, Patel said it was quite all right. "In One Day cricket, anything is possible. All teams are equally good. But the first match is important."

Leicester, home of a large Gujarati population and

the city that elected Britain's first Asian MP, Keith Vaz, is offering the tourists huge moral support. As large numbers of Indian supporters turned out to watch the practice sessions and matches, security had to be tightened so as to allow the players to get on with their practice.

"There are lots of invitations from the community but we are not accepting anything now," said Patel. "We want to concentrate on our practice and our work and do what we have come here to do: win the World Cup."

Shrabani Basu/Leicester



Different strokes

A definitive guide to World Cup '99

GROUP-A

**South Africa
India
England
Sri Lanka
Zimbabwe
Kenya**

GROUP-B

**Australia
Pakistan
West Indies
New Zealand
Bangladesh
Scotland**

IT'S WORLD CUP time once again. As the cricket carnival invades millions of homes all over the world, there is no escaping the seductions of the sport. Twelve teams, 180 players, 42 matches, 21 venues spread over England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland and Holland, more than 300 hours of cricket — it really doesn't get bigger or better than this.

"It will be the most extensive, colourful and widely-watched World Cup in history...an unprecedented feast of cricket and entertainment," declares Lord Maclaurin, chairman, England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB).

If size/quantity does matter, so does quality. And on this score, too, World Cup '99 promises to deliver something special. As Sir Colin Cowdrey put it: "This should be the most competitive World Cup, not only because of the new format, but also because of the high standards maintained by nine teams out of 12. Anyone can beat anyone on any given day. So I'm looking forward to a very exciting and interesting World Cup."

As are countless others in the cricketing world. In England, this tournament could mark the resurrection or ruin of a sport struggling against all odds — football frenzy, loss of interest, lack of sponsors, want of cricketing heroes...If Stewart's side puts up a good show and the coffers of the ECB fill up during the World Cup, who knows, cricket might well regain pride of place in English life.

In Pakistan, there is personal reputation and national prestige at stake. A poor performance will bring the betting scandal back on centre-stage and surely end the careers of some of the current superstars. But if Akram and his boys come back with the Cup held aloft and head held high, what then?

In South Africa and Australia, anything less than victory will amount to national tragedy. In the isle of the defending champions, ambitions of an action replay are fast fading. In the Caribbeans, the cricket-crazy people are pinning their hopes on a miracle, while in New Zealand and Zimbabwe, they are ready for a pleasant surprise or two. Kenya firmly believes that it has what it takes to beat 2/3 teams in Group-A (India included), while rookies Bangladesh and Scotland are there "for the experience".

In India, the World Cup provides a pleasant diversion from the pathetic political pitch. For some time now, the eyes of the nation will not be on the machinations of Mayawati or the schemes of Surjeet, but on the flashing blade of Tendulkar, the top-spinner of Kumble. The mood swings of the nation will depend on how the team fares in England. An early exit will spell doom, while a successful foray into the later rounds would do wonders to the morale.

Going by the revised format, the pressure to perform will be unrelenting. By the night of 31 May, six teams would have to pack their bags. By 13 June, another two out of the Super Six would be homeward bound. After the semis on 16 and 17 June, two nations would be left to fight it out for the top honours on 20 June, at Lord's. So, 38 days after the first ball has been bowled, one of the teams will be crowned king of the world, while another will be plunged into despair, mourning the slip between the Cup and lip.

And as we get ready to drink, eat, sleep, talk, walk, live and die cricket, here's a definitive guide to the participants in Bat-Ball Bonanza '99:

GROUP A

South Africa

Form favourites

Team: Hansie Cronje (C), Gary Kirsten, Herschelle Gibbs, Jacques Kallis, Daryll Cullinan, Jonty Rhodes, Dale Benkenstein, Mark Boucher (wk), Shaun Pollock, Allan Donald, Steve Elworthy, Lance Klusener, Alan Dawson, Derek Crookes, Nicky Boje

World Cup record: Semi-finalists, 1992, quarter-finalists, 1996

Strength: The most well-balanced One-Day outfit — an exceptional leader, two great opening bowlers, quality all-rounders, the best fielder in the world, a shrewd and successful coach

Weakness: Has made a habit out of entering big tournaments as favourites, but crumbling when it comes to the crunch. Will miss the expertise and experience of Pat Symcox, who retired weeks before the Cup

Match-winners: Donald, Pollock, Kallis, Cronje, Cullinan, Klusener



Jonty Rhodes

Expert comments:

● "South Africa have the team to win the World Cup. But it will take all Cronje's leadership and Woolmer's innovation to ensure they do not fall prey to poor performance at a crucial time" — **Barry Richards**

● "They just love their cricket and it shows. Everytime they are on the field, there is a buzz about the place. The guy to watch out for is Shaun Pollock" — **Ian Botham**

Conclusion: Joint favourites with Australia. Most definitely the team to beat. This is their big chance. Will surprise no one if they go the whole way. Then again, will surprise very few if they choke

England

Home stretch

Team: Alec Stewart (C, wk), Nick Knight, Graeme Hick, Nasser Hussam, Graham Thorpe, Neil Fairbrother, Andrew Flintoff, Adam Hobbins, Vince Wells, Mark Ealham, Ian Austin, Robert Croft, Darren Gough, Alan Mullally, Angus Fraser



Darren Gough

World Cup record: Runners-up (1979, 1987, 1992), semi-finalists (1975, 1988), quarter-finalists (1996)

Strength: Home conditions, an efficient One-Day side, some exciting talents

Weakness: Low on star value and on morale. The pressures of playing at home with supporters and the media already preparing the team's obit

Match-winners: Gough, Fairbrother, Hick, Flintoff

Expert comments:

● "England are in with a real chance. The left-handers, Nick Knight, Neil Fairbrother and Graham Thorpe, along with Gough and Mullally could do the trick for them" — **Alan Border**

● "Home advantage will count. England should make it to the semi-finals. Then, who knows?" — **Ian Botham**

Conclusion: On this World Cup depends the immediate future of cricket in England. So, are "the lads" men enough?



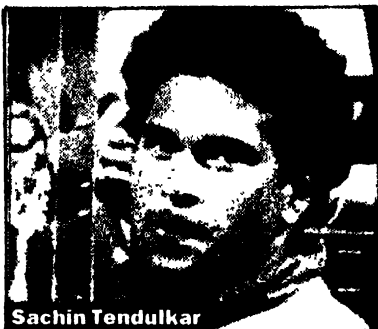
India

The outsiders

Team: Mohammad Azharuddin (C), Sachin Tendulkar, Sourav Ganguly, Sadagoppan Ramesh, Rahul Dravid, Ajay Jadeja, Amay Khurasia, Robin Singh, Nayan Mongia (wk), Ajit Agarkar, Javagal Srinath, Venkatesh Prasad, Debashish Mohanty, Anil Kumble, Nikhil Chopra

World Cup record: Champions (1983), semi-finalists (1987, 1996)

Strength: The best batsman in the world, a powerful batting line-up on paper, a good seam/swing attack, a crafty leggie



Sachin Tendulkar

Weakness: A top-heavy batting line-up prone to chaotic collapses, sloppy fielding, an uninspiring skipper, confidence at ankle-level

Match-winners: Tendulkar, Ganguly, Jadeja, Srinath, Kumble

Expert comments:

● "For me, they are the dark horses. If Tendulkar and the others get it right, watch them go. The key question is: do they have the bowling to defend totals?" — Ian Botham

Conclusion: Tendulkar must have a terrific month if India is to make any headway. Dravid and Co. must back him up. Conditions will suit the bowling attack. Consistency at the crease continues to be the chief cause of concern

Sri Lanka

Losing their grip



Team: Arjuna Ranatunga (C), Sanath Jayasuriya, Romesh Kaluwitharana (wk), Marvan Atapattu, Aravinda de Silva, Roshan Mahanama, Hashan Tillakaratne, Mahela Jayawardene, Chandrika Hathurasinghe, Upul Chandana, Pramodya Wickramasinghe, Chaminda Vaas, Ruwan Kalpage, Eric Upashantha, Muttiah Muralitharan

World Cup record: Champions, 1996

Strength: A canny captain, explosive batting prowess, a good new-ball bowler, and a top-grade off-spinner

Weakness: Ageing stars, a death-wish to slog the swinging ball and a suspect bowling attack

Match-winners: Jayasuriya, De Silva, Muralitharan

Expert comments:

● "The conditions will be very important. In an English spring, when the ball will move around in the air, they need to shift slightly the strategy of the way they bat" — Dav Whatmore (coach of Team Lanka '96)

● "They are a dangerous batting side. But I don't fancy them going too far in English conditions" — Ian Botham

Conclusion: Could well be engaged in a close tussle with India for the third qualifying spot from the group

Zimbabwe

Fighting fit

Team: Alistair Campbell (C), Grant Flower, Murray Goodwin, Dirk Vlijter, Stuart Carlisle, Andy Flower (wk), Neil Johnson, Guy Whittall, Heath Streak, Eddo Brandes, Henry Olonga, Mupfema Mbangwa, Paul Strang, Adam Huckle, Andy Whittall

World Cup record: Made the grade in 1983. Yet to qualify for the knock-out stage

Strength: A famous fielding side, a blend of exuberance and experience, are just about beginning to believe in themselves

Weakness: Suspect batting. Bowling crumbles under pressure

Match-winners: Murray Goodwin, Neil Johnson, Paul Strang

Expert comments:

● "They lack real depth of quality to win the tournament, but they have the potential to cause a few surprises" — Duncan Fletcher (former captain)

Conclusion: Dave Houghton has taught the team to fight. Should spice up the struggle for Group-A honours

Kenya

Also-played

This is their third World Cup, after 1975 and 1996 (the high-point being their win against the Windies). Coached by Alvin Kalicharan, the Kenyans are expected to put up a fight without winning a match. Steve Tikolo and Maurice Odumbe are the ones to watch

GROUP B

Australia

Star trek

Team: Steve Waugh (C), Mark Waugh, Adam Gilchrist (wk), Ricky Ponting, Darrel Lehman, Michael Bevan, Tom Moody, Damien Martyn, Shane Lee, Shane Warne, Brendon Julian, Paul Reiffel, Adam Dale, Damien Fleming, Glenn McGrath

World Cup record: Champions (1987), runners-up (1975, 1996)

Strength: Star-studded batting and bowling line-up. A vastly experienced and immensely talented One-Day side

Weakness: Have had an overdose of cricket, culminating in a nerve-wracking tour of the West Indies. Battle fatigue?



Match-winners: Mark Waugh, Gilchrist, Bevan, McGrath, Warne

Expert comments:

• "A good all-round side, they are a flexible combination and so the captain will always have a lot of options. The side features strong, aggressive batting, bowling that has variety and athletic and safe fielding" — Ian Chappell

• "A very dangerous and capable side. If anyone can stop them, then I would fancy South Africa" — Ian Botham

Conclusion: Should comfortably make it to the Super Six, and beyond. But of late, are having a few bad days in office

Pakistan

Talent vs temperament



Wasim Akram

Team: Wasim Akram (C), Saeed Anwar, Shahid Afridi, Ijaz Ahmed, Inzamam-ul-Haq, Wajahatullah Wasti, Yousuf Youhana, Salim Malik, Azhar Mahmood, Moin Khan (wk), Shoaib Akhtar, Waqar Younis, Abdul Razzaq, Saqlain Mushtaq, Mushtaq Ahmed

World Cup record: Champions (1992), semi-finalists (1979, 1983, 1987), quarter-finalists (1996)

Strength: A super pace attack (spearheaded by the fastest bowler in the world), an array of attacking batsmen, fighters to the core, a captain who leads by example

Weakness: Batting debacles, poor fielding. Lack of discipline. Given to self-destruct. Can beat the best, be beaten by the worst

Match-winners: Anwar, Afridi, Ijaz, Inzamam, Akram, Shoaib, Saqlain

Expert comments:

• "Pakistan has the ability and the ambition to win the Cup. Wasim has matured into a fine captain. We have the most balanced bowling attack in the world and if Inzamam, Ijaz, Anwar and Afridi score runs consistently, there is no reason why we shouldn't win it again" — Imran Khan

• "If they can sort out their off-field problems and concentrate on the cricket, they will be very tough to beat" — Ian Botham

Conclusion: A volatile lot. Scores highest marks for talent, lowest for temperament. Will have to remain united (on the field and in the dressing room) for over 40 days. Are desperate to do well — for pride, passion, and to put the match-fixing allegations in the shade. Have borne the brunt of the betting scandal. Will prosper or perish by it



Inzamam

West Indies

Islands in the stream

Team: Brian Lara (C), Sherwin Campbell, Stuart Williams, Shivnarine Chanderpaul, Keith Arthurton, Jimmy Adams, Phil Simmons, Ricardo Powell, Ridley Jacobs (wk), Curtley Ambrose, Courtney Walsh, Mervyn Dillon, Reon King, Henderson Bryan, Nehemiah Perry

World Cup record: Champions (1975, 1979), runners-up (1983), semi-finalists (1996)



Curtley Ambrose



Brian Lara

Strength: A champion bat, an ageless new-ball pair, a good series against Australia

Weakness: Poor fielding, suspect batting, inadequate bowling resources for the middle overs, off-the-field tension

Match-winners: Lara, Chanderpaul, Ambrose-Walsh

Expert comments:

● "For the West Indies to win the World Cup, their established stars need a good support cast. The question is whether the West Indians currently have the manpower to get the job done" — **Michael Holding**

● "A fragile side, they need a remarkable turnaround if they are to mount a serious challenge to win the trophy after 20 years" — **Ian Botham**

Conclusion: It will take an epic effort from Lara to take his team beyond the Super Six. Ambrose and Walsh will retire without World Cup honours

New Zealand

Shock value

Team: Stephen Fleming (C), Nathan Astle, Matthew Horne, Craig McMillan, Roger Twose, Adam Parore (wk), Chris Cairns, Chris Harris, Gavin Larsen, Dion Nash, Simon Doull, Geoff Allott, Carl Bulfin, Daniel Vettori, Matthew Hart

World Cup record: Semi-finalists (1975, 1979, 1992), quarter-finalists (1996)

Strength: A bunch of quality bits-and-pieces cricketers, steady seamers, stylish strokeplayers, feisty fielders

Weakness: Lack the cutting edge that helps make winning a habit. Batting tends to crack against express pace and leg-spin

Match-winners: Cairns, McMillan, Harris

Expert comments:

● "On their day, New Zealand can knock over anybody. But their form has been plagued by inconsistencies" — **Glenn Turner**

● "A team to keep an eye out for, bubbling along nicely with some very handy players. A good each-way bet for those who fancy a flutter" — **Ian Botham**

Conclusion: Should find conditions just right for their brand of cricket and run the Windies close for a place in the Super Six

Scotland & Bangladesh

Also-played

Both are playing their first World Cups. One of them will win one game, the other none. But the players of Bangladesh, coached by Gordon Greenidge, and Scotland, coached by Jim Love, will learn a lot from this outing. And it will give a boost to cricket back home in both the countries.

Sumit Das Gupta/London

Pitch battle

World Cup '99 takes off amid quarrel and controversy

THE AUSTRALIANS WERE trying their skills at public relations; the Indians were busy getting some net practice; the West Indians and the South Africans were engaged in a verbal battle; the Pakistanis were riddled with match-fixing allegations; the Sri Lankans were starting out once again as the underdogs despite being the defending champions; the English were still looking for inspiration; and the Bangladeshis probably thought they had got off at the wrong airport. There seemed so little sign of a World Cup tournament in the air.

Even as the curtain was about to be raised on the last biggest cricket event of the millennium, the skies over England were cloudy with whiffs of controversy, bad blood between players, low sponsorship and lack of energy. It was meant to be a carnival, but on the surface there was less of a ripple than a club bridge tournament. What carnival can we expect, said *The Guardian*, with no music, no banners and no dressing up? With hardly any publicity so far, the event has been described here in the media as having "all the marketing muscle and PR hype we might expect from the Freemasons".

But the teams that arrived in time for the warm-up sessions began their mind-games in earnest. South Africa's Allan Donald, targeted West Indian captain Brian Lara for his first broadside. In an extract from his new book (excerpts from which were published in a newspaper here), he accused Lara of lacking the dynamics and professionalism to turn around the West Indies during their 5-0 defeat in South Africa this year.

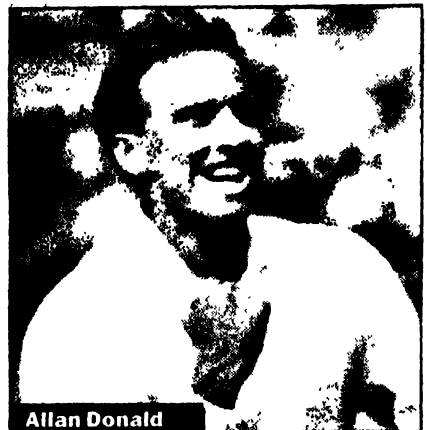
He said the West Indians looked demoralised before the series had begun. "I lost all respect for him as a captain last winter," Donald wrote. "I've known Brian since 1992 and I was saddened to see how he had changed over the years. I found it difficult even to have a conversation with him during the West Indies tour."

The dressing-room row had occurred in South Africa when Lara refused a request by Donald for a pair of Lara's batting gloves to auction at a benefit function. Donald had told the West Indies captain that he needed to learn to speak to people with some courtesy. Lara later gave Donald a pair of gloves "without saying a word". In contrast, Donald said Sachin Tendulkar was "a different class from Lara as a professional cricketer...Tendulkar is pulling away from Lara every year as the best batsman around."

Practising at Hove, Donald told reporters that he refused to apologise to Lara, though he admitted that the book had appeared a bit harsh.

Donald had told Lara that the West Indies captain needed to learn to speak to people with some courtesy. Tendulkar, said Donald, was "a different class from Lara as a professional cricketer...he is pulling away from Lara every year as the best batsman around"

MORE VERBAL BATTLES continued between English captain Alec Stewart and Sri Lankan captain Arjun Ranatunga, who had been involved in heated exchanges in Australia last winter. At the captain's meeting before the match, England sought a clampdown on the use of stump microphones at the World Cup, saying these would discredit the game if verbal abuse from players was heard by the spectators. But Ranatunga immediately opposed the move, saying that he favoured leaving the stump microphones on "24 hours a day" so that the public were fully aware of what took place on the field.



Allan Donald



Brian Lara



Sachin Tendulkar

It was during the One-Day International at Adelaide last winter that Ranatunga led his men off the pitch in protest over the no-balling of Muttiah Muralitharan for throwing. Stewart was then heard clearly over the stump microphones telling Ranatunga: "Your behaviour today has been disgraceful for a country captain."

England fears that the broadcasting of hostilities during the matches will have a detrimental effect on attempts to promote the World Cup as an irreproachable carnival of cricket.

The Sri Lankan team is still under a cloud as it awaits the 14 May court judgement in Colombo on the violent scenes surrounding the recent election of the board president.

Meanwhile the Australian team, which plays its first match of the tournament against Scotland on 16 May at Worcester, is in an upbeat mood with captain Steve Waugh wooing the Welsh at Cardiff where the team is staying. "England is the home of cricket and it's good to be here," he said. He added that his team was the best-balanced he had known for this kind of cricket in the 15 years he had been around. "The World Cup is the Holy Grail in terms of One-Day cricket, and we are treating it as the ultimate challenge. We expect to win, anything less and we'll be disappointed." Waugh was in the Australian team that won the World Cup in 1987 in Calcutta and

remembered it fondly. "That was one of the highlights of my career, playing in front of 95,000 people in Calcutta. So it would be great to be at Lord's for the final on 20 June." Australia reached the final of the last World Cup, losing to Sri Lanka in the highly-charged finals in Lahore.

Waugh also said that the Dukes balls to be used for the tournament were harder than the white Kookaburra and had bigger seams, so the first ten or 15 over could be a little more difficult for the batsmen than in the past.

Facing the new balls for India will be Sachin Tendulkar and Sourav Ganguly who have expressed their confidence in being chosen to open the series. Ganguly has been advised to go for the runs and concentrate on his running between the wickets by consultant Bobby Simpson.

MEANWHILE, RIVALS PAKISTAN are recovering from the sudden resignation of coach Javed Miandad just before the World Cup following internal power struggles. The team, billed as one of the favourites to win the tournament, has now appointed former Pakistan captain Mushtaq Mohammed to act as coach. Earlier, they had brought in a former Minor Counties cricketer to coach them through the World Cup. Richard Pybus will also be coaching the team through the next six weeks.

Pybus was recommended by Raja Khan, Pakistan's assistant tour manager, who was an old friend from London PE College. Pybus, who runs South Africa's national cricket academy and had met Wasim Akram when Pakistan toured South Africa two years ago, was elevated to the top job after Miandad's last-minute walk-out.

The team, which plays its first match on 16 May against West Indies in Bristol, arrived in England with a shadow over their heads. Six team members, including captain Wasim

Etc, etc, etc

Some World Cup '99 sidelights

THE TOP DRAW

Is, undoubtedly, our man from Bombay. With every expert worth his opinion crowning him "best batsman in the world", every cricketing great naming him in his World XI, Sachin Tendulkar's presence has set the World Cup stage alight. Next on the attention scale are Brian Lara, Shoaib

(and player's) lips is: will the English weather play master of ceremonies, will there be more shower than sun? No one, least of all met offices, seems to have a clue. So, just hope for the best and prepare for the worst. And what's worse than a wash-out? A partial wash-out that brings the diabolical Duckworth/Lewis method for revised targets — incomprehensible to cricket lovers and mathematicians alike — in to play

THE PERFECT HOSTS

The Netherlands will be playing host to South Africa and Kenya who meet at Amstelveen. This is the first instance of a non-playing nation donning the host hat

END OF AN ERA

With almost every World Cup comes the realisation that this could be the last tournament for some cricketing greats: Curtly Ambrose and Courtney Walsh (West Indies); Allan Donald and Gary Kirsten (South Africa); Arjuna Ranatunga and Aravinda de Silva (Sri Lanka); Md Azharuddin (India); Steve and Mark Waugh (Australia); Alec Stewart and Neil Fairbrother (England); Wasim Akram (Pakistan)
Sumit Das Gupta/London



Alec Stewart

Akhtar, Shane Warne and Andrew Flintoff

SPECTATOR SPORT

Some of the county grounds hosting the matches have a capacity of hardly 7,000. And at Lord's, the largest ground in England, the capacity has just been hiked from 28,500 to 30,000!

RAIN, RAIN, GO AWAY

The question on every cricket enthusiast's



Ridley Jacobs during a warm-up match at Edgbaston

Akram, were defying the Lahore court summons as part of the inquiry into cricket betting and bribery

Lawyers representing the six summoned players — Wasim Akram, Waqar Younis, Salim Malik, Mushtaq Ahmed, Ijaz Ahmed and Saqlain Mushtaq — will conduct their defence in the Lahore court in their absence.

"Even if we had been in Pakistan we would have refused to attend the court hearing in person," Wasim said. "The match-fixing allegations don't matter to the Pakistan team. We have been winning for the past three months and we are very confident. We have some tough boys."

World Cup organisers threw out the English captain's request of playing the national anthems of each country before the matches. "This is a carnival of cricket and we are trying to get away from the old ways of doing things," said events manager Michael Browning. "National anthems are all very well for other events and flag-waving but not this World Cup. The players just want to get on with the game and anthems are part of old cricket and this tournament is all about new cricket."

It was not yet certain whether anthems would also be ruled out before the finals to be played before the Queen at Lord's on 20 June.

England and Wales Cricket Board, the World Cup organisers, continued to get flak as it was revealed that the much-hyped World Cup song by Dave Stewart *All over the World*, which was to rev up the carnival, would not hit the shops till 29 May when the competition would be almost half over. The



Facing the new balls for India will be Sachin Tendulkar and Sourav Ganguly who have expressed their confidence in being chosen to open the series

organisers are also facing legal threats from official suppliers, LG Electronics, for their decision to award the contract for the fixed third umpire cameras to Panasonic.

To boost the English team's morale, Vodafone, official sponsors of the English team, have offered a pound 200,000 bonus to England if they can win the World Cup. England will be guaranteed pound 50,000 if they reach the semi-finals and pound 100,000 if they reach the finals. Vodafone's bonuses will help each member of the 15-man squad to earn around pound 60,000 under the terms of a recently-drafted World Cup contract.

The race to win the new pound 27,000 gold and silver ICC cricket World Cup trophy, designed and manufactured in London by Crown Jewellers, Garrard, has begun. With the largest-ever prize fund of US\$ 1 million, the next six weeks will see the teams going all out for the ultimate challenge. •

Shrabani Basu/London

MIND GAME

Huma Akram recollects how she helped Pakistani cricketers overcome stress. Plus, tips for the Indian side



Saqlain Mushtaq had approached me about two years back to fine-tune his mental conditioning at that stage. It is not what you would understand as a full-length session with the client. It was quite casual, as Saqlain did not develop any major problems.

His was just a case of low motivation. I helped him to build his confidence. He was worrying too much about the next

match, the next opponent. To use our terminology — it was a plain and simple case of 'performance anxiety'.

I decided to do an indirect hypnosis on him. Saqlain was asked to relive all good cricketing memories of his past. I told him, "Try to get those feelings back, try to remember everything vividly. What was the sound like when you had succeeded? How did the crowd react? How was your heart beating?"

I had asked him to play back those memories again and again. You will feel much better. The mind is somewhat like a tape recorder. You can erase or block the bad memories and fill your mind with the good ones. This is an important part of therapeutic psychology.

Top golfers of the world often use hypnosis while striving for excellence. They channel the feeling of a good win when they are down, rediscover the happiness and get up. In this intensely-lived, high-pressure times, psychologists have become a part and parcel of top tennis, volleyball and basketball players. There is nothing unusual about it.

It is only in the sub-continent that you get to hear a notion like 'if you're getting cured by a psychologist, then you must be mad or semi-mad'.

The ethics of our profession suggest that you should not work with your near and dear ones. There is a possibility that your personal relationship might get affected. Also you might not be able to treat the patient properly, your objectivity might get clouded.

Yet, keeping in mind all that, I've worked with Wasim in the past and to put it mildly, he did get the desired results.

But now, it is a case of when he wants it and when he doesn't. Only when he thinks my help is necessary, the psychologist in me takes over, pushing the 'wife' into the background. There are times when he says, "I've had enough," and I immediately switch off.

Generally speaking, Wasim is a very tough-minded person. He does get hurt, very badly hurt, but he also has the in-built mechanism, so he gets up and resumes fighting. Wasim never gives up.

Yet there have been times when even a tough-

minded Wasim broke down. Basically, he was very disappointed. His attitude had turned negative. It was like this, 'after having done so much for the country, if cricket brings you such a bad name, then to hell with it'. And if at all he wanted to play cricket, it was for some small club or remote place or wherever. But, not for Pakistan anymore.

I tried helping him by pointing out several options, which his life at that stage was offering. I told him if he retired, people might misconstrue it as if he was running away, which is against his principle. I said, I could only give you suggestions. I won't influence your decision. The decision is all yours.

I also used the technique of hypnosis with Wasim. Again, there are

Saqlain Mushtaq: Huma helped him to build confidence





Huma with Wasim Akram: "Wasim is a tough-minded person. He never gives up"

misconceptions about hypnosis. It is nothing but taking someone to a state of mental relaxation. Medical science proves that if you're not stressed out, then you could think more clearly, be sharper and your mind will remain much more open to positive suggestions.

If you can keep your mind filled only with positive thoughts, then you can conquer the world. You can make things really work for you. All you've to know is how to use your mind.

Arshad Khan had also come to me. He had a different kind of anxiety, that in a team full of senior cricketers, he was possibly the odd man out. Every run that he gave away, he thought, was thereby letting the side down, the seniors down.

I explained to him that this Pakistan team is not like that. Here the seniors do not treat the juniors like that. Here everybody depends on and supports everyone else. If you just concentrate on doing your own thing properly, they will be more than happy.

There is a great psychologist working in the Pakistan team, Moin Khan. He shouts so much during the match that at the

end of the day's play he can't talk to you properly. But he is such an indispensable member of the team. He is very strong mentally and constantly motivates the bowlers and fielders.

I have played no competitive sport at all, nor do I claim to know anything about cricket. But whatever little I did in my school days has made me aware of the fact that even a little word of encouragement or just a pat on the shoulder can do wonders for you. Moin does exactly that. You'll have to only ask the Pakistan bowlers to find out how motivated they feel in Moin's presence. He claps for almost every delivery.

I don't get to see the Indian wicketkeeper encouraging his bowlers that much. But Moin does that. He wipes out the negative thoughts. The team only thinks of winning. The concept of losing doesn't even enter their mind.

As I said to players like Arshad or Saqlain or whoever comes up with little, little problems. These are not very difficult to solve. Saqlain, for example, was scared of air travel. In such cases, you've to take the patient to a real situation. We call it 'flooding' the thought process, so that the fear disappears. You can't just solve it by sitting at your

"Only when Wasim thinks my help is necessary, the psychologist in me takes over, pushing the 'wife' into the background"

chamber. So when the team was travelling abroad to play a series, I made Saqlain sit inside the aircraft and do a few breathing exercises. He has felt okay since then.

Arshad also had to be given a couple of breathing exercises. I told him to make a daily habit of standing in front of the mirror and telling himself loudly — I'm the best in the world. I'm the best. I said, Arshad let your roommate play a few pranks on you. Let him ridicule you. The world will light up for you soon.

In a highly competitive environment it is but natural that down the line you will have a hiccup or two. To keep the required concentration going you have to really remain focussed.

A team sport requires constant grouping and constant motivation. Whoever is getting tense, you try and get him relaxed. Now relaxation varies from person to person. X might relax through music, Y might just read a book and Z will be quite happy with a round of golf.

I've read Dale Carnegie's book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, but honestly, I'm not his follower. I'm more into psychotherapy and indirect hypnosis. I practice Ericksonian hypnosis.

I think my training and years of experience have taught me to understand people as they are. Wasim, for example, initially found it difficult to understand the psyche of someone like Afridi and Inzamam. I managed to impress upon him that irrespective of how much you moan and grumble there will never be someone like you. It's not possible. They are different personalities.

I humbly suggested you bring out the best in them by channelising their pluses. You work on Afridi's boundless energy, shut out the 'Jaswadi' streak in his personality as much as you can. But even if you tried harder, Inzamam will remain a laid-back character, Afridi will remain an overactive guy. That's their nature.

I watch so little cricket on my telly (yes, I rarely watch my husband) that I'm not very qualified to pass a judgement as far as the other teams are concerned.

Yet, even if you watch a team for 15 minutes, I, for one, get a fair indication as to what they are feeling inside. Whether they are pumped up or not, I presume, the Indian team when they play under Azhar requires more communication.

Imran, during his time was a very distant captain in the sense that barring one or two, he didn't mix with the boys socially. He was always on a different pedestal. But when it came to encouraging them on the ground, he always did his best. Imran was very vocal. I doubt if Azhar does the same. He looks as if he is under tremendous stress and pressure all the time. His body language suggests that he is slightly cut off from the side. A psychologist might come in very handy for himself and the side when they play under him.

Ganguly is another guy who is hugely talented but there is something about him that seems to suggest that he allows himself to get rattled. It could be performance anxiety; it could be the pressure of high expectations from his people. That blow from Shoaib Akhtar's delivery may have also shaken him apart. I wouldn't know. All I can tell you is that some little thing somewhere is blocking his natural flow. And I'm quite convinced on that.

Kumble, on the other hand, looks very calm and collected. He is very positive and knows exactly what is expected of him. Jadeja has the personality and the necessary mental qualities to make a good leader. He is a very positive person and



Sachin Tendulkar: "He has to slow down a bit for his own and the cricketing world's benefit"

that can make things happen for India. He is also a valuable member of the team

And to round it off, let me talk about the proudest possession of the Indian team, one Mr Tendulkar. He appears to be very calm. As calm as Kumble perhaps, but my humble opinion is that he has to slow down a little bit for himself and the cricketing world's benefit. I reckon too much is happening with him. Wasim and the boys tell me that the Indian team depends so much on Sachin that the moment he is gone, their shoulders drop.

May be this overdependence is taking its toll. I don't know. All I can tell you is that back problems are 65 per cent stress related. I am sure had Sachin consulted a physiotherapist, he would've told him to slow down and simply take one step at a time.

I can't claim to have known him as a person, but from what I hear, he is very down to earth, a nice guy. Possibly that is the reason why he can't say 'no' to anybody. He can't disappoint anybody. But by doing that he is expecting too much of himself. He has to assess himself and form a realistic goal. If you want to do everything at one go, it's bound to come back to you sooner or later.

The moral of the story: 'You're not a superman, even if you are a Tendulkar!' •

Huma Akram is a professional psychotherapist. She is married to Pakistan cricket captain Wasim Akram.

AWAY FROM THE Line of Control

An encounter with a Pakistani officer

It is easier to ambush Pakistani servicemen on the Line of Control (LoC) than it is to trap them elsewhere. They are by nature generally suspicious of their Indian counterparts anywhere. After giving out their name, religion and blood grouping, they will recite the Geneva Convention.

But things are changing.

Meeting a Pakistani army officer far removed from the LoC is an encounter of a different kind. It unveils a softer face. One is likely to see this face on foreign courses, international or regional seminars, peace-keeping missions and diplomatic assignments. In a sustained engagement the mask comes off.

As in happier times during flag meetings on the LoC following a breach of truce, were occasions for a hearty exchange of cuisine, one-way movement of booze and hefty backslapping.

Once the ice is broken and they recognise they are on neutral territory, Indian and Pakistani officers get on like a house on fire. On ground of their choosing, they flock together, though not without the periodic argument over Partition, Bangladesh and the World Cup.

Former Pakistan foreign secretary and UN envoy to Mozambique, Mr Shah aryar Khan, wrote to the Indian Prime Minister and Chief of Army Staff (COAS), praising the work of Indian peace-keepers. There have been other occasions where Pakistani and Indian soldiers have worked together under the UN flag.

As a rule once they retire, from being hawks all turn doves. Recent examples of these voluntary conversions are late Gen. K. Sundarji and Generals Mirza Aslam Beg and Jahangir Karamat, all army chiefs. Sundarji was not being metaphorical when he declared, in his



Gen. K. Sundarji (left) and Gen. Jahangir Karamat: after retirement they turned from hawks to doves

heyday as chief, that he wanted to cut through Pakistan like a hot knife through butter. Similarly, Aslam Beg advocated equally grandiose plans for an offensive through Punjab.

Some credit for this change in mindset must go to American NGOs. They brought them together on neutral soil to start the war for peace and confidence building measures. While Aslam Beg and Sundarji would talk about strategic restraint and stability, their serving counterparts do not rule out conventional war and jockeying for strategic heights in Siachen. The Pakistani tone in this exchange has been and continues to be the more belligerent.

Everyone knows the military has to highlight, even exaggerate the threat in order to meet its budgetary demands and

keep its forces alert and motivated. But the serving service elite cannot express its inner feelings in public. These are unfortunately repressed and usually only informally expressed, if at all.

It is a pity 52 years have been wasted without a dialogue between the soldiers and airmen who are defending the LoC in India and Pakistan. There is so little rapport between them. The only regular contact between the two is via the hotline across which, every Tuesday the two chiefs of Military Operations speak to each other. Unfortunately, military diplomacy has not been explored at all.

The Pakistani colonel you're meeting has spent more than half his service deployed along the LoC. The other half



Indian troops at a border post: military diplomacy may obviate the use of force altogether

He's most impressed with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's initiative, most of all, the received sincerity in his speech about improving the quality of life of the people of the two countries. He singles out Vajpayee's declaration, "We can solve all our problems...including what you want". This, the colonel happily interprets as the Kashmir issue.

The other striking features of the exchange are the colonel's constant reference to Vajpayee as Atalji, the avoidable cost of war, the need to reinforce Confidence-Building Measures and strengthen the SAARC effect. Unlike in conversations with senior retired Pakistani service officers, the colonel makes no condescending comments like 'India should act like Big Brother', 'Be magnanimous' and 'Initiate a land-for-peace deal'.

"What about revenge for 1971?" He's silent. Some needling later, comes the retort: "It's happening isn't it? In Kashmir. God punished us for crimes in East Pakistan. He's now punishing you in Kashmir." Allah is a great equaliser.

What about the nuclear tests? These have given Pakistan the military equaliser and enhanced stability and security in the region. "I may be wrong. But I sense some change in attitude in Pakistan towards India. It is in the army too. But much less. Inwardly, people want to end the animosity."

The colonel's ultimate fear is: "I hope you won't write about this conversation." His Indian counterpart would have been similarly stricken by this very fear.

The lesson from this encounter is the need for controlled exchange between the officers and men from both sides for confidence-building. The Indian proposal for exchange of officers on professional courses starting with the National Defence College is a good one. This can be followed up by posting observers for field exercises.

They say diplomacy works best when backed by military force. Military diplomacy may obviate the use of force altogether. •

(The author was a general officer commanding of the Indian Peace-Keeping Force in southern Sri Lanka. He is the founder member of the Defence Planning Staff of the Chiefs of Staff Committee)

on more challenging assignments. In the twilight zone of a seminar after suitable prodding he will begin confiding his list of insecurities. This is not new for an Indian.

The first is the feeling of physical insecurity. "You dismembered Pakistan in 1971. We have lived in fear since then". After that "you went nuclear". Here comes the hurt: "Your political leaders immediately challenged and threatened us over Kashmir." It was also the provocation (or pretext): "You, forced us to respond. The nuclear score card is 6-5." Similarly, the missile test tally is 3-1 in favour of Pakistan. "So what you can do, we can do better." Then sarcastically: "And we won't even begin to talk about

hockey and cricket."

Next in the conversation figures the inevitable: "Kashmir first, followed by the immortality of the UN Security Council resolution 726 on Kashmir." The colonel is quick to point out: "Status quo on LoC is not acceptable to Pakistan." His line on Siachen: "You are across the glacier. We're around its base. It is much easier for us to stick it out there." Implicit in this remark is: India can stew in its own juice in Siachen.

From Siachen the colonel moves to the triad of bus diplomacy — the Lahore Declaration, the memorandum of understanding and joint statement.

The party is

*High-flying socialite
Bina Ramani gets
nailed after the murder
of a model in her New
Delhi bar*

The expression on Bina and Malini Ramani's face said it all. The mother-daughter duo had been arrested for running an unlicensed bar in Delhi's posh Qutab Colonnade. On their way out of the Patiala Court after securing bail, they looked visibly relieved.

They were laughing.

For many years now they had been operating in a grey area, eluding the long arm of the law. Their association with dodgy characters like Chandra Swami and Romesh Sharma is now well-known. But this time the Ramanis may have overreached themselves. They have entangled themselves in the gruesome murder of model Jessica Lall, shot dead on the night of 30 April at Tamarind Court.

Bina Ramani is the youngest of nine children of the Lalwani clan, and was the most-favoured child. The family named its electronic company after her—Binatone. The venture didn't really take off. But Bina moved ahead and fast.

Married to Andy Ramani, a senior officer with Air India posted in New York, Bina had her first brush with stardom when she met a man who called himself a 'spiritual guru'. Chandra Swami hobnobbed with the creme de la creme. He holidayed on arms-dealer Adnan Khashoggi's yacht.

Ramani cultivated the relationship. She tied a *rakhi* on him and opened an account in her name where she 'kept' some of his money. The cash was "meant for some refugees in Surinam and I kept it only for five days". Which is hard to believe, but the Indian sleuths



Jessica Lall: the model-cum-occasional-bartender-for-fun was shot through the head when she refused to serve a drink

were taken in. Her marriage over, Ramani returned to India with one daughter and decided to set Delhi's social life ablaze.

Chandraswami was soon a thing of the past. Till the whole thing was raked up again after Rajiv Gandhi's assassination. The Jain Commission summoned Ramani for her 'little mistake'.

In the meantime, Ramani introduced the shopping-in-slush concept in India.

She got the country's top designers to design and display their ware in a run-down village — where their Mercs and Toyotas rubbed shoulders and fenders with buffaloes? It wasn't difficult for Ramani to convince the village *pradhan* that this was a great deal for him and his villagers. So the Hauz Khas village was born. It sold synthetic lifestyles with badly-made grossly overpriced clothes.

But to live is to be seen. And to be

over

seen is to be seen at the Hauz Khas village. Bad water, pretentious food and the stink of the Indian village was romanticised and marketed as a sureshot recipe for achieving celebritydom. The 'Ramani lifestyle' had arrived.

The 'country/dehat' phase didn't last long. Bored, the Ramanis and groupies turned to more exciting ventures. Organising was Bina's forte. And what was the trendy thing to organise? Charity. What about AIDS, of course.

An invitation to Richard Gere to promote an AIDS awareness campaign brought grief and tears. Delhi socialites are better than the best when it comes to backbiting. And when Ramani tried to be selective in inviting them, they panned her efforts. Gere, who first consented to be 'exploited', snarled back at sponsors when asked to 'discreetly' pose for

pal Rajan Nanda's Yamaha motorbike. And the money from the charity ball? No one dared to ask.

For the Ramanis, life was a party and it was at one such party that the mis-

**Does Bina Ramani,
a British
passport-holder,
have the permission
to do business in
India? Did she
instruct her waiters
to wipe the blood?
Can the guests at
the party be tried
for violating excise
laws?**

hap took place. Delhi's hippest watering hole was all lit up on that Thursday night. The guests were the capital's me-too glitterati. Only this time real life caught up with them. A foolish and cheeky comment ('You'll get a sip only after you pay a thousand bucks') by Malini Ramani and Jessica Lall, former model and occasional bartender-for-fun at the Tamarind Court, had to pay the price. Manu Sharma, who wouldn't take no for an answer, walked up to the model and shot her through the head when she refused to serve him a drink.

While the Lalls are not speaking to the press any more because nothing will come of it and because 'nobody really cares', the Ramanis have, for now, been booked only for violating excise laws.

Several questions have been raised. Does Bina Ramani have the permission to do business in India? (She holds a British passport and her visa expires next year. Her Canadian husband is in India on a business visa though.) Can the guests at the party be tried for violating excise laws by drinking at a place which has no liquor permit? (Designer Rohit Bal thinks this is ridiculous because one doesn't check the permit before having a



Tamarind Court: Delhi's hippest watering hole became the site of a grisly murder

"The conservative culture of Delhi is suffocating"

This interview was recorded a day before her arrest. Bina Ramani was her usual self—brazen and swaggering with confidence. There were the occasional tears, the wronged woman act. She was a mother ready to do anything to indulge her child (At 32, daughter Malini is not exactly a child, but hey, a mother is a mother). She put down her current troubles to the fact that she was a woman who had made a place at the top the hard way and was now being brought down by the envy and jealousy of rivals.

Excerpts from the interview:

SUNDAY: What do you feel about the whole episode?

Bina Ramani: I regret that I came back to India and gave so much to this country, thinking that it is my homeland. I had better choices abroad than what I had here — yet I chose to come back. Several people profited from my energy and hard work — financially and emotionally. And look what I have got in return.

Q: Aren't you to blame?

A: Yes, I made a few mistakes but I was being a

good parent. My kids were growing up when I decided to come back to India. My elder daughter, Geeta, is more independent and she decided to stay back [in the US]. But Malini could not stay



Bina Ramani

without me and so she quit her fashion designing course with FIT, New York, to come back to India. She wanted to open a restaurant so I helped her launch a small coffee shop in Hauz Khas village called The Small Cafe. The coffee shop did well — word spread that it was a nice, fun place to be in and then slowly drinks began to be served.

Q: And then Tamarind Court happened. Liquor was served without a

bar licence, wild, late night parties were held — have you no control over what Malini does?

A: You have to understand that our upbringing is Western — we see no wrong in an open culture, late nights, interacting freely with men. It is the conservative culture of Delhi which is suffocating and this may lead many to take recourse to methods which may violate laws. Do you know that Malini does a lot of work for charity — looking after orphans, sponsoring poor kids. But no one talks about that.

Q: But Tamarind Court was flouting all rules. Did you not know as an experienced businesswoman that you cannot serve liquor without a bar licence? Or are you unaware of what was happening at the cafe?

A: I think the cafe as conceived by Malini was a great concept. It was a place where you could breathe easy. There was a certain snobbishness attached to it, hardly a place where the likes of Manu Sharma would be seen...

Q: But he was there.

A: I don't know how he got in. The Thursday

night party was entirely Malini's idea and was essentially a fun concept. I am told that it was very popular. In fact, we had applied for a liquor licence but as with every thing else in this country, this was also taking long. If the excise department had been prompt then, perhaps, this incident would not have happened.

Q: Are they to blame?

A: To a great extent. But I admit that we also made some mistakes.

Q: Like wiping off the blood?

A: Not at all. There was just a trickle of blood. If I wanted to wipe off the blood then I would have got rid of the shirts that the waiters who were holding her in the car on way to the hospital were wearing. I risked my life to catch the killer — I accosted him but he pushed me aside. People later told me that I was foolish to risk my life.

Q: What now? Have you learnt a lesson?

A: I try to learn a lesson but I cannot stop loving my country and doing things for it. I don't know whether I want to stay here or go back to where I came from.

drink at a party and it was a private party anyway.) Did or did not Bina Ramani instruct her waiters to wipe the blood off? Where are the missing alcohol bottles? Ramani has amnesia.

What is apparent is that Malini Ramani is being shielded. She is not allowed

to meet the press, preferring to stay closeted in her room and feign illness when it comes to police interrogation.

Bina Ramani's contention is that she is God's chosen one — one of those who the almighty picks up and puts through a trial because He loves them the most.

Her astrologers foresee similar ordeals, as people will always be jealous of her energy, her achievements. It's all there in her destiny.

But if you are Bina Ramani then even fate can be bought. •

Pallavi Ghosh/New Delhi



TACTICAL MOVE: R. V. Deshpande

KARNATAKA

Changing sides

Six Lok Shakti members cross over to the Congress

It's spring season for most politicians. And if that seems like a contradiction, refer to the figures of those crawling out of the woodwork for joining, rejoining and quitting various parties for various reasons. Last week, six Lok Shakti members crossed over to the Congress. One of the more prominent amongst them was R.V. Deshpande, former industries minister and a so-called Hegde loyalist.

On the eve of state and parliamentary elections, this seems like a *regular* thing for a *regular* politician to do. Only Deshpande puts it differently. "I was officially never a member of the Lok Shakti. I was just a Hegde-supporter," he says. "But I felt that Mr Hegde had distanced himself from the activities of Karnataka and we need somebody who would work for the state," he adds.

However, critics put it differently. "What is now happening at the state level is all a fallout of bigger things to happen at the Centre," explains Srikant Murthy of the Lok Shakti. "But what those who have switched over to the Congress don't

understand is that the Congress has the capacity to reduce regional stalwarts to nothing," he adds. Murthy has a long list of Congress leaders who he feels are 'squirring' in their seats. "What happened to Vijaya Bhaskara Reddy, Arjun Singh or, for that matter, Sharad Pawar? How long can they survive clinging on to Sonia Gandhi's apron strings?" asks Murthy.

For those in Karnataka this is not the issue. Right now, the imminent dangers are of getting a ticket and winning the elections. Only when this is interpreted with Parliament elections in mind that it takes a different meaning altogether.

For instance, senior leaders within the Congress say that Deshpande's induction in the party was all part of a larger strategy. "Deshpande has made loads of money and just when the Congress was trying to take care of its image, we go ahead and let such a man join in," complains one state Congress worker. Official sources confirm that Deshpande's candidature came through because Margaret Alva was worried about her own

parliamentary constituency of Uttra Kannada. The former has won four consecutive elections from the area and is believed to have a good hold over his Assembly constituency.

Besides, Alva like her mentor, is struggling hard to fight the 'foreigner' tag. "She is not a local person and most workers resent that," explains a Congressman.

However, the party denies all such claims. "R.V. Deshpande is an experienced and able leader and his entry into the party is more than welcome," says Professor B.K. Chandrashekhar of the Congress. "As far as Magaret Alva is concerned, she is one of the most competent leaders that we have in the party and all these allegations are baseless," he adds.

While Deshpande may not have to worry about a ticket from the party but the rest, who quit the Lok Shakti in search of greener pastures, are unlikely to manage and if they do, it will be a tough tightrope. Either way, Congressmen feel that their party will have too much on its plate during the ticket distribution. To check the problem of any kind of dissidence in near future, state president S.M. Krishna has already announced that entry into the party will be absolutely 'unconditional'. While the Congress at the grass-root level is still battling with a loss of credibility after the fiasco at the Centre, many state leaders are making a beeline for Congress membership. This has not made life easier for the Opposition parties.

Ramakrishna Hegde, Union commerce minister, has already regretted the fact that his old-time loyalists like Deshpande have switched sides. "It is unfortunate that these people have left from the firing range and walked right into the fire," says Murthy. "Though it is not much of a loss since the second line of leadership is with us and they are grass-root workers, very hardworking and honest," he adds.

But for a party that is already at the fringes, this kind of optimism sounds unrealistic. Though the Lok Shakti, along with the Bharatiya Janata Party, has a strong presence in north Karnataka, the exodus has no doubt come as a setback. "More than anything else, this is a major psychological setback for Hegde," says Chandrashekhar. Congress has a lot of expectation out of Karnataka this time. The state party president has also claimed that the Congress will sweep the polls.

The Congress has gone on the offensive. Hegde is being painted as a 'spent force' by the Opposition. And Hegde's counter-attack is on. "Congress is insulting the nation by projecting Sonia Gandhi as its prime ministerial candidate," he fumed at a public function in Bangalore.

The BJP is desperately trying to cash in on the sympathy wave—the party's defeat at the Centre is being projected as a conspiracy by the Congress to destabilise the country. But whether it will last for another three months is difficult to say. The state BJP has also not projected anybody as its chief ministerial candidate which seems to be going against it. At the moment, only a charismatic leadership can help it with better results.

H.D. Deve Gowda, former Prime Minister and Janata Dal stalwart, is also busy playing his own game. "He will do anything to see that Hegde along with his allies do not do well," says Murthy. "He is now cosying up with the Congress just to make sure that he and his sons get into the Assembly and Parliament somehow," he adds.

It is just a beginning to a tough and troubled period for most parties. For the Congress and the BJP, there is a lot at stake. Each state will decide the future of the government at the Centre. •

Anuja Joshi/Bangalore

BIHAR

War of wards

Violent inmates disrupt identification parade inside Beur Jail

It seems that even long years of confinement is unable to eliminate the violent streak within the inmates of Beur Central Jail, located on the outskirts of Patna. Certainly not when it comes to the CBI, which is probing the murder of CPI(M) MLA Ajit Sarkar. Having earned notoriety for being a place where inmates resorted to violence, Beur became famous as a 'luxury' prison after former chief minister Laloo Prasad Yadav spent some time in the jail last year.

Clashes within the jail premises is nothing new. But on 1 May, it was the CBI sleuths who were at the receiving end. The team had gone inside the jail, along with an important witness, to investigate the murder of CPI(M) legislator Ajit Sarkar.

The CBI was to hold a trial of identification (TI) parade so that the alleged killer, Rajan Tiwary, could be identified by the witness Kalyan Chand Sarkar, brother of the slain MLA from the Purnia Assembly segment in north Bihar.

At around 4.30 pm, the CBI team reached Beur Jail with the prime witness in tow. A CBI magistrate was also accompanying the team. Rajan Tiwary was lined up with 15-20 undertrial prisoners for the TI parade. The moment Sarkar started moving down the line to identify Tiwary, all hell broke loose.

The inmates got hold of Sarkar, and after forming a cordon,

Family matters

A workshop in Calcutta suggests ways to cope with the stress generated while caring for mental patients

A workshop, on 'Caring Caregivers—a family intervention', was recently organised in Calcutta by Turning Point, a voluntary organisation. Turning Point officials feel that such an interaction is needed because the family of a chronically ill mental patient has often been found to be under severe stress.

Speaking to SUNDAY, organisers of the workshop pointed out that while it is natural for mental patients to remain anxious about their wards, their worries cannot always be relieved. Hope turns to despair and some families fail to bear the gloomy atmosphere associated with the presence of a mental patient. These families often suffer setbacks from which they cannot easily come out.

When parents are told that their child is suffering from schizophrenia, it comes as a rude shock to them. In such a situation, they experience strong emotional turmoil, feel guilty and usually blame each other for being a 'bad parent'. This may even lead to marital discord and end in divorce.

started beating him up. The matter took a turn for the worse when the inmates started pelting stones on the team. In the skirmish, assistant jailor Bhim Singh sustained injuries. A couple of CBI officers, who could not dodge the stones, were also hit. At this, the *pagli ghanti* (the alarm bell) was sounded and police personnel rushed in to bring the situation under control. The CBI, meanwhile, had to beat a hasty retreat, without its job done.

Sources, however, tell a different story. They say it was Surajbhan Singh of Mokama (Patna district), lodged in the same jail, who objected to the manner in which the TI parade was being held. Apparently, Rajan Tiwary was called alone from the ward and the prime witness, Sarkar, was to recognise him. Meanwhile, a jail staff would signal that he was Tiwary.

But, this is a version brushed aside by CBI sources. They point out that the inmates resorted to violence simply to disrupt the TI parade. Ironically, assistant jailor Bhim Singh has also been threatened by the inmates with dire consequences. Sources also claim that Tiwary and Surajbhan have joined hands inside the jail.

It may be recalled that the CPI(M) legislator was gunned down by unknown assailants on 13 June, last year. The state government had ordered a CBI investigation. The CBI is also looking for the former Samajwadi Party state president, and former MP of Purnia, Rajesh Ranjan alias Pappu Yadav. A reward of Rs 50,000 has been announced for his arrest by the CBI.

It is worth mentioning Rajan Tiwary, after his arrest, had disclosed that it was Pappu Yadav who wanted Ajit Sarkar dead and had even hired contract killers to do the job. An AK-47 assault rifle was reportedly promised to the killers as bonus. The dead don Sriprakash Shukla, along with Tiwari, is



REMOTE CONTROL: Pappu Yadav

believed to have carried out the murder.

Pappu Yadav, meanwhile, continues to elude the CBI and is reported to have crossed the India-Nepal border. While the Patna police felt that disruption of the TI parade was the motive behind the violence in Beur on that day, a division Bench of Delhi High Court, comprising Justice Anil Dev Singh and Justice A.K. Srivastava, have rejected the petition of Pappu Yadav. He had sought an end to the CBI investigation against him in the murder case. The case, ironically, became strong against him, after Tiwary was arrested from the house of a BJP MP in Delhi and confessed to the crime. •

Naved Zahir/Patna

In the past decades, there was a tendency for mental health workers to blame parents for their children's disorder. Today, this attitude is changing and blaming the parents is being regarded as incorrect and counter-productive. Mental health workers now try to enlist the family members' help in their therapeutic programme. They also are more sensitive to the real feelings of burden and isolation many families experience in their attempt to care for a schizophrenic. But they also have a lot of unanswered questions about the illness.

HELPING HANDS: a group discussion in progress at the Turning Point workshop



Turning Point felt that these problems had to be faced and sorted out. Hence the need for the workshop. The idea was to enlighten parents about the illness and also to provide support to them so that they can play a more positive role which would be helpful for the patients. The seminar was attended by psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers who interacted, during the group discussions, with the caregivers to help them identify problem areas and evolve strategies for coping with the stress.

There is another reason why such workshops assume importance. A crucial area of family interaction is that of expressed emotions (EE) of parents or caregivers. It has been found that higher the level of EE, higher was the instances of relapse in schizophrenia.

Since the onus of caring is only on the family today, the members need considerable support and help of professionals to cope with this problem. With increasing urbanisation and breaking up of the traditional family structure for the neo-nuclear architecture, the supportive resources earlier provided by the family are already on the decline.

The need for caring families, therefore, is to organise themselves into self-help groups. During the workshop, such a group was formed so that they can share their experiences of handling mental patients and discuss their own needs and problems and evolve strategies to cope with the stress of caring a mentally-ill patient. Turning Point hopes that more such self-help groups will come up. •

Jyoti Sangal/Delhi

We'll miss you, Mr Yogi

Wonderful actor takes his last bow

For P. Y. Patel. Those who were Doordarshan viewers back in 1988 will have no difficulty in recalling the character who introduced himself thus, and charming the socks off everyone.

Now we're talking about Ketan Mehta's delightful series *Mr Yogi* in which the hero plays an America-returned dude, who sports an execrable accent and is on the lookout for a suitable girl. The lad's been playing the field back in the US, and is halted in his merry tracks by that old chestnut he gets a 'mother serious' wife and rushes back to find his mother hale and hearty and determined to wean him off his potential gori mems.

As the bashful Gujju-turned-Yank, who had to brave 13 prospective brides (serials those days were restricted to 13 episodes), to choose his one and only, Mohan Gokhale was superb. In the following years, right up till the present,



JIPRA SHAWA

THE GOOL DUE: Mohan Gokhale

he played select roles in big banner TV; they were always etched finely and played with great delicacy.

When he died last week, it was at a time when his career was in its second wind. He had already made a mark in two films *Bhavni Bhavai*, and *Mirch Masala* before he came to *Yogi*. But for a long time after that, he didn't get the roles he deserved in the movies. So he gravitated back to TV.

Recently he was playing important parts in several prime time serials, notably Sony's *Alpvinam*, where ironically his death was done to a messy death only a couple of days ago. And his film career was on the upswing: when he was in the *Chandni* of a heart attack, he was shooting for *Hum Tum Aur Woh*.

Another wonderful actor who we will miss Mohan Gokhale. •

WEST BENGAL

The bad earth

The state suffers its worst dry spell in recent memory

A current of cool wind swept through a sizzling land a little past sunset on 2 May. And with it came lightening, thunder and lashing rain. It was the first shower after an unbroken dry spell of seven months during which time, not a drop of rain had fallen. There was rejoicing in the thirsty plains of western West Bengal that evening; the sun, people imagined, had finally relented. But a sense of helplessness surged again in the following week.

Several districts of West Bengal are in the grips of a severe drought, and an acute water crisis is tormenting the villagers. The water level in many parts has gone down alarmingly and hundreds of shallow pumps are lying idle.

And in order to make them work, people have thought up a rather tell-tale technique that gives away the state of the groundwater reserves in districts such as Midnapore, Bankura, Purulia, Birbhum, Howrah, Hoogly and Malda. To ensure that the pumps touch the water level, 15 to 20-ft trenches are being dug and the pumps placed on their floors. In effect, therefore, the shallow pumps are being lowered to more than their normal depths. At some places in Midnapore district, the situation has become so desperate that pumps are being lowered into dugwells.

Midnapore district, which had an average annual rainfall of 1692.82 mm over the past 12 years, recorded zero rain fall till 2 May this year. As a result, 10,099 tubewells out of a total of 37,935 have gone dry. Rice on 2,51,160 acres have been destroyed, and vegetables, nuts and other crops on 15,000 acres have been ruined.

A study done by Dr Guru Prasad Chattopadhyay, head of the department of geography and environment management, Vidyasagar University, has revealed that nearly 7,000 of the 8,000 wells in Midnapore town are presently dry.

The water crisis has badly hit the district's livestock as well. The prices of cattle, goats and buffaloes have fallen sharply, as harried farmers, unable to ensure enough water for their animals, are resorting to distress sale. In some cases, male members of families have migrated with their cattle to more moist areas or to river sides. So far about 70 heads of cattle are said to have perished in Midnapore district alone.

Hindus and Muslims alike have held mass prayers in Midnapore to bring rain. *Yajnas* were held on 24 and 27 April and also on 1 May in the presence of nearly 800 people.

Similarly, Muslims held special *namaz* for the rains. Muslims believe that droughts occur because of human sins for which birds and animals have to suffer as well. So, in these special prayers, cows and goats, too, are herded into the prayer site.

The religious outpouring may have pleased the rain gods on 2 May, but they have turned sullen since then. The gravest human sin, some say, is the reckless use of water. And this year's drought has shown that there is not much of it left underground to cope with emergencies. •

Sk. Amir Rahman/Midnapore



SUNDAY WEEK

KUSUM BHANDARI

BEGINNING 16 MAY, 1999

ARIES

(21 March-20 April)

You will enjoy following up lines of research, especially into unusual subjects. Solutions to long-standing problems may be right under your nose, but you will have to view matters more objectively to see what is to be done. Your intuition will be working overtime to come to grips with current difficulties.

TAURUS

(21 April-20 May)

Hidden factors are working in your favour. Help can come from well-placed sources. This is a good time for pulling out all the stops to further any property matters. Business associates may not be trustworthy. Being ready to switch into immediate action will give you a head-start over other competitors.

GEMINI

(21 May-20 June)

Play it cool. There is no need to make a song and dance about anything that matters. A good time for putting on an act and having the public eat out of your hand. Be sure you are properly dressed for any occasion. Appearances count for a lot and it is more who you know that matters, not what you know.

CANCER

(21 June-20 July)

This will be a very lively and useful week. You should have no difficulty in channeling your energies into constructive activity. You are likely to be so efficient that everything you do can really count. But it is inadvisable to get ahead of yourself.

LEO

(21 July-20 August)

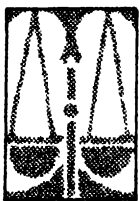
Life can become much simpler as a result of happenings now. Something you have been striving towards for ages can finally be attained. A secret wish can come true. Someone you want to get to know better or be on intimate terms with may open their doors to you. It's a week you are likely to relish.



LIBRA

(21 September-20 October)

Your financial situation should be more healthy by the end of the week. Conditions are now most encouraging for implementing business expansion plans. Stepping up production and finding new outlets and clients is favoured. Long journeys can be both enjoyable and productive.



SAGITTARIUS

(21 November-20 December)

It may be wise to take into account any possible damage to property or possessions you own. Money spent on more expensive insurance policies may actually represent savings in the long run. A good time for digging and getting to the bottom of things. Stand back and see other people's point of view.

CAPRICORN

(21 December-20 January)

Be a little more sensitive to the inner condition of loved ones. They may be going through a hard time at the moment, even though they are hiding it. It won't be easy to maintain harmony in the home. Extra efforts may be required to keep abreast of chores. Employers are likely to be in a sympathetic mood.

AQUARIUS

(21 January-20 February)

Domestic details beckons your attention. Don't forget that household commitments looms large over your head. Attempts to forsake them will be disastrous. Deft diplomacy can make even your worst enemies become pleasant friends. Keep away from all gambling. A good week for the artistically inclined.

PISCES

(21 February-20 March)

Be wary of making commitments that you may find difficult to honour. Reputations can suffer badly if you let others down. Make plans with friends or partners before they make alternative ones. Influential people may be busy with other concerns.

VIRGO

(21 August-20 September)

It may well be that your investments are not as lucratively placed as they might be. Though this is a good time to research alternative placements, it is unwise yet to make major changes. Try discussing with professional consultants new investment possibilities.

SCORPIO

(21 October-20 November)

Be positive when making decisions. It's time you stood up for your rights and made sure to do things as you wish. Advice given may not suit you or could be wrong. Having come through a bad spell, you may have to make up on lost time. Joint account complications can delay you.

Smokescreen

■ A recent commerce ministry decision to put cigarettes under the open general licence has raised more than a few eyebrows. For one thing, this means that the Rothmans proposal to set up shop in India becomes infructuous. What is the



Rothmans: stubbed?

point in setting up a subsidiary when you can bring in cigarettes through the legit route?

For another, there are some mysterious forces at work in this decision. Till a day before the new policy was announced, the commerce ministry was of the view that cigarettes would be kept out of OGL. Suddenly, because of some influence from quarters close to the minister, this has been reversed.

Could a former newscaster and a relative of the minister have something to do with it?

Work more talk less

■ The head of IPAN, one of India's leading advertising firms, Rajeev Desai, held a delightful event last week to celebrate the launching of a book, *India's Business Culture*.

The chief guest at the launch was former finance

HEARD AT THE FINANCE MINISTRY

When she was in Delhi, her cell number was Essar. Soon she'll have to tell people her cell number in Tihar.

A BUREAUCRAT ON HOW INVESTIGATIONS INTO JAYALALITHA'S INCOME TAX AND FERA VIOLATION CASES WERE BEING SPEEDED UP



Manmohan Singh: refreshingly brief

minister Manmohan Singh, at the best of times, a man of few words. First, Desai was asked to make a speech, an offer he declined gracefully, because he'd said all he wanted to say in his book.

Then Singh was asked to speak. He just clasped his hands together, beamed and

breathed "Rajeev" and opened the package, handing over the book to the author. He then beamed at the audience and left.

Reporters who hoped Singh would say something about India's business culture looked on dismayed. "Rajeev", uttered in tones no

CHECK-LIST

After the sanctions: who's relented, who hasn't

■ **Germany:** Contributes 40 per cent of all development aid to India. This was suspended after India conducted the nuclear tests. Now, the Germans say it wasn't suspended because of the tests, but because a new government was elected in Bonn. However, no aid is forthcoming, though technical cooperation on defence and other projects goes on.

■ **United States:** Showing signs of relenting. The World Bank and the IMF have relaxed some of the 'restraints' (they were never 'sanctions') and technical cooperation goes on apace.

■ **Japan:** Again, no sanctions were imposed, only measures, such as access to yen loans being restricted. However, Japan is harder to convince about the essentially benign nature of India's nuclear tests.

matter how dulcet, doesn't make a story.

But it was a refreshing launch, because it ended without any speeches at all, in record time.

Weak signals

■ All is not well with the formerly family-owned Asianet Satellite Communications Limited.

The Malayalam satellite cable TV company was devised, put together and nurtured by Sashi Kumar, television personality, and his uncle Raj Menon, a Moscow-based NRI.



Sashi Kumar: switching channel?

For some time, under pressure from the Bombay-based Rahejas who own and promote Hathway Investments, Asianet was being sought out to add to the Rahejas' extensive media empire — they are part owners in a cable TV network in Tamil Nadu.

At first Sashi Kumar resisted selling out. Then he sold his 50 per cent of the business to his uncle, who in turn sold it to Hathway Investments. Now, there is uncertainty about the shape it will be given.

Meanwhile, Sashi Kumar is considering launching a television software company and will continue to be a consultant to Asianet. •

Dining with Amar Singh

■ Never, never, ever cross Amar Singh. The portly Samajwadi Party general secretary will stop at nothing to ensure he wins an argument.

Just the other day, he and Congress member Jitendra



Singh: embarrassing Prasad

Prasada were together at dinner at a wedding, with about 500 other guests. They exchanged pleasantries while ladling *mattar paneer* on to each other's plates and went on to talk to the other guests.

So Jitendra Prasad was both angry and amused when, while watching TV one evening, he heard Amar Singh say that he had made friends in the Congress and 'why, just the other day, I had dinner with Jitendra Prasad'.

Under the normal circumstances, Prasad might have been flattered. But given the current state of play in the Congress, consorting with SP is like sleeping with the enemy. And in any case, Amar Singh *didn't* have dinner with him.

Prasad has explained his position to the high command. But has resolved never to talk to Amar Singh again at a social gathering. Because who knows what use he will make of it!

HEARD IN NEW DELHI

From broker to broke...that's what India's role has been.

A BUREAUCRAT ON INDIA'S HELPLESSNESS
IN HELPING NAM RESOLVE THE ETHNIC
CRISIS IN KOSOVO

about how an election was thrust upon India by a set of designing politicians.

He was about to expand on the designing politicians



P.A. Sangma: angry with designing politicians

Loose talk

■ P.A. Sangma, so vocal in Sonia Gandhi's praise once upon a time, has turned hostile. At a dinner last week, at his residence, he was complaining

CHECK-LIST

Prohibition and the states

■ **Haryana:** Lifted the otherwise strict ban on drinking or selling liquor recently, because of the pressures on the state's economy from low excise collections. However, there are many who feel the ban on alcohol should be reimposed.

■ **Andhra Pradesh:** Imposed prohibition, but lifted it for Indian Made Foreign Liquor. Country liquor is still prohibited. This is supposedly one of the reasons for expecting Chandrababu Naidu's government to do badly in the forthcoming elections

■ **Karnataka:** Did toy with the idea of imposing prohibition but when the chief minister heard of it he shot it down.

■ **Delhi:** Had considered, started beer pubs as a way of boosting excise collections, but now the government says the proposals will have to wait.

in his own party when he was shushed by his guests, which had many journalists. They told him not to be so rash. Who knows who will form the next government?

Profound words!

■ UP chief minister Kalyan Singh's speech was heard by everyone with a great deal of interest. At a party meeting, Singh spoke passionately about leaving chief ministers alone to take autonomous decisions, because that was the hallmark of leadership.

He said what was the point of having a Raja who found himself tied hand and foot when it came to harming those who were trying to harm him. And what was the point of a Raja who found himself unable to reward those upon whom he chose to smile?

Profound words, and the BJP squirmed as it listened. Many in the party admit that Kalyan Singh has been dealt



Kalyan Singh: taking matters in his own hands

a raw deal. But no one wants to do anything about it. Now, presumably Kalyan Singh has decided to take matters in his own hands, having announced that he doesn't want to be a compliant Raja. So watch out Rajnath Singh!

Political Intrigues

A certain Congress functionary was sitting in his office when the telephone rang. He picked it up and listened and told his col-



K.K. Narayanan meeting the Congress delegation

league that it was an important call so he had to take it alone.

When they trooped back inside, they found their host at a flag. Calls were being made to Sharad Pawar, Manmohan Singh and Pranab Mukherjee's residence. A memorandum was being drafted.

"What's going on?" the guests asked.

They were told that Rashtrapati Bhavan had suggested that it might be a good idea for the Congress to ask the President of India some questions about transfers and postings of bureaucrats that the BJP government had carried out.

How could the Congress be seen to defy a suggestion made by the Rashtrapati? So the Congress, a three member delegation of Manmohan Singh, Sharad Pawar and Pranab Mukherjee went and called on President K.K. Narayanan and presented against the President's wish a caretaker government was taking

the President's wish to say, the President had an appoint-

HEARD IN THE SOUTH BLOCK

We had an Atal Behari as Prime Minister; but if Laloo Yadav had become Prime Minister, we would have had a Total Bhari for a PM.

A BUREAUCRAT

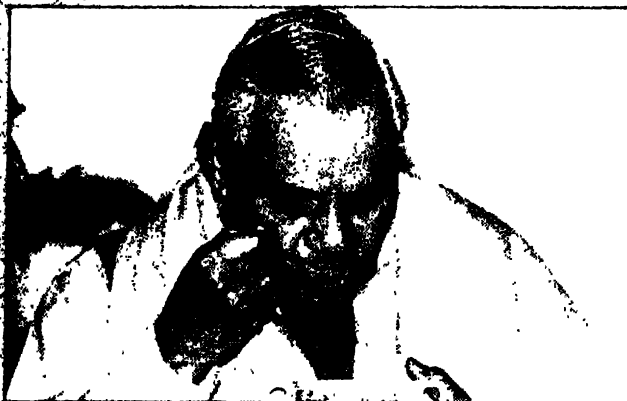
Letter from Mr President

This is not all. The secretariat of the President of India has been taking unusual care to ensure that the press comes to hear of communications/instructions which are being exchanged between the President and PMO.

Two weeks ago, the Congress went to call on the President to protest against the Prime Minister's telecast to the nation.

Which is fine. India is a democracy and government media should not be used by

the party in government for self aggrandisement, especially as elections are round



A.B. Vajpayee asked for an explanation

the corner.

But what is dismaying is that reporters were called and told by Rashtrapati Bhavan, that the President had written a letter to the PM listing the Congress charges, and asked A.B. Vajpayee for an explanation.

For good measure, it was suggested that the President's 'letter' not be referred to as letter but as a "communication". That was the red herring.

May be, instead of all this subterfuge, it might be sim-

pler if someone were to suggest that India has a presidential form of government.

CHECK-LIST

Political coachings

■ **Telugu Desam Party:** Kamala Chaudhary of the TDP joined the Congress, ending her substantial presence to the party she was sworn to opposing till some years ago. The TDP looked as if it would carry her Lok Sabha ticket this time, for her quiet but active campaign against Chandrababu Naidu.

■ **Samajwadi Party:** The whole Maharashtra unit of the party joined the Congress, ensuring that there cannot be any understanding between the two in a state where the Samajwadi Party had managed to win some presence.

■ **Samata Party:** The party was supposed to be joining the Congress, but that will come as no surprise. And the Samata Party will be well rid of it.

■ **Tamil Nadu:** The Congress has the cordiality between G.K. Meepanar and J. Jayaram, the TMC's M. Dennis was welcomed back into the Congress. Meepanar continues to say he is a loyal servant of the Nehru-Gandhi family, while the Tamil Nadu unit of the Congress continues to kick the TMC and root for the TMC's sworn enemy, the AIADMK.

World Cup notes

■ Minister for sports and youth welfare, Uma Bharti doesn't just belong to the *sangh parivar*, she believes in travelling with her own *parivar*.

She was invited by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), in her capacity as minister, on an all-expenses paid trip to England to watch the World Cup.

Bharti was naturally thrilled, but she told BCCI she didn't want to be lonely. So along with her, she wanted to take a family of six others. Could the BCCI foot their bills as well.

BCCI was firm. We can pay for you, they said, but not for families. So the invitation was withdrawn.



WHERE NEXT?



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1 day - 3 nights in Seychelles

Two sems in England

One mother of a trek in the Himalayas

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SUNDAY



Sonia Gandhi and the revolt: what happens next?

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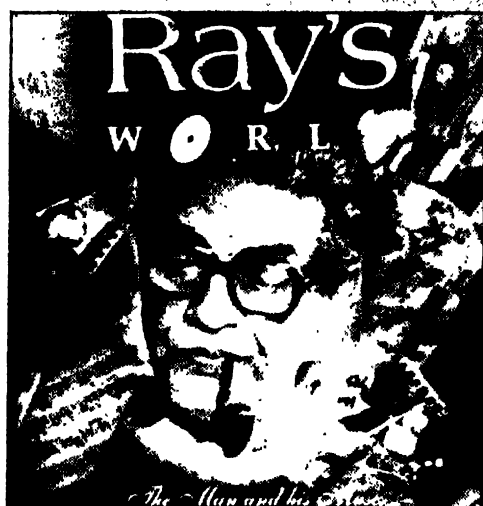


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Letters.....	4
Sight and Sound.....	6
Seen.....	7
Profile.....	26
Spotlight.....	40
News.....	59
Sunday Week.....	63
Business Diary.....	64
Random Notes.....	65
Delhi Diary.....	66



DOCUMENTARY

Ray-watch

The first-ever CD-ROM on Satyajit Ray hits the stands.....42

CULTURE

At a glance

Jaya Jaitly and her team map out a definitive guide to Indian art and crafts.....38

COLUMNS

MANI-TALK

Mani Shankar Aiyar.....8

POWER PLAY

Rajiv Shukla.....11

THE SOUTH BLOCK

Inder Malhotra.....33

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Editor: Vir Sanghvi



COVER STORY 12

The Rajiv legacy

As Sonia Gandhi takes control of the Congress, Rajiv's memory returns to haunt Indian politics

NEIGHBOURS 30

Ominous signs

Nepal becomes the centre of an international anti-India game during the elections



FOCUS 36

End of innocence

How Bangalore's street children are learning to cope with sexual abuse, drugs, hunger and stress





Net menace

The cover story *Invasion through the Net* (9—15 May) made an interesting reading. It has been rightly pointed out that things have undergone a sea-change since Windows was conceived. Except for the Third World countries, most of the rest of the world is now wired up.

Viruses have always exist-

soft is refusing to take into account.

Prabir Chakrabarty, Calcutta (West Bengal)

■ The cover story on hacker threat has correctly said that hackers spy on big corporates who in turn spy on their employees. We probably don't realise it, but right now everyone is spying on everyone else.

The writer has rightly pointed out that this is not a First World problem. India is very open to the menace. Unless we wake up to the problem, we might have to face terrifying consequences.

Urvashi Trehan, Bombay (Maharashtra)

Scant regard

A question needs to be asked to those who for political reasons press for a convention that a "caretaker"

the country especially at a time when NATO has shown scant regard for the international law and the UN?

S. Venkatesan, Delhi

At the mercy of allies

In toppling the BJP-led government there was no consensus or co-ordination among the Opposition but sheer opportunism of weathercocks (*What a mess!* 2 May—8 May). The pace with which Jayalalitha accelerated the process of destabilisation was the same through which she has sunk into ignominy.

If secularism is the ground on which they wanted to forge a new force, only God can save them. The Congress which boasts of being the protagonist of this concept

Laloo Yadav and Mulayam Singh.

What a preposterous proposal was it to make Deve Gowda a common candidate for the top job of the country! Does anyone think that Sharad Pawar will take things lying down when somebody else is given the crowning glory? The government at the Centre has been toppled, but will the next one bring stability?

U.S. Iyer, Bangalore (Karnataka)

■ Another general elections thrust upon the Indian electorate will not lessen instability. The chances are that the next Lok Sabha election will not be very different from this one. Any government that emerges will be at the mercy of its coalition partners. If it is not Jayalalitha, it will be Karunanidhi. If it is not Mulayam Singh, it is Laloo Yadav. Any of these people could wreck the government by withdrawing support and moving a no confidence motion.

Bimal Chaudhury, Calcutta (West Bengal)

Advantage Batsman

Those who love cricket believe that at the highest level the game should be an encounter between bat and ball (*Cricket fatigue*, 4—10 April). But cricket has increasingly tilted in favour of batsman. Bowlers have restrictions imposed on them. The one-day variety has been pro-batsman ever since it began. Given all this no cricket lover is genuinely pleased to learn that the balls being used in this World Cup is having smaller and flatter seams.

The implications of this change are enormous and none of them will benefit the noble game.

Priya Tandon, Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh)



The world of computers: caught in the Net

ed even for MS-DOS. But the Windows OS lends itself to misuse as no other system before it has—it has no security worth mentioning. Security has become paramount—a fact of life that Micro-

government cannot take any major policy decisions (*The guilty men and women of 1999*, 2—8 May). Have they ever thought that any such constraint would be harmful for

should think about Operation Bluestar and massacre at Turkman Gate. Will the intelligent electorate remove the mask of hypocrisy of the Congress and leaders like Harkishen Singh Surjeet,

For the poll

The question is not whether the Congress or the BJP can come to power at the Centre but that election which has been imposed on us could have been avoided (Victory? 25 April—1 May). The President, the election commission and all the political parties must understand that politics is not a silly game.

There was a time when people were enthusiastic about exercising their franchise. Now it seems the only person showing the enthusiasm is Mr Narayanan himself.

Bedashrutl Mitra, Raigarh (MP)

Smear campaign

This refers to the column headlined *Arun Shourie and his acolytes* (25 April—1 May). I have not seen the article in *The Asian Age* but if the subject is what has been mentioned in the column, these records have been too oft-repeated by people like him. The facts are known to all and sundry. Only the columnist has spiced his article with choicest abuses directly aimed at Mr Shourie. A question certainly comes to the mind: why has the columnist gone out of his way to demean Mr Shourie? It would not be just because he wrote an article which didn't suit the columnist's plans. One would accept critical analysis but for an direct, unabridged, unedited abuse.

It must be said that in spite of his 'lower' status at St Stephen's, Shourie rose to be acknowledged as a leading political commentator of our times. They are read by all and not necessarily by the *sangh parivar* only. In comparison, the columnist has

not even been able to convince his own party that he has anything to offer.

Kartik Misra, Cuttack (Orissa)

Nefarious design

This refers to the story *The Sonia effect* (25 April—1 May). Whatever the compulsion and constraint could be for the Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav, he has done a commendable job by rejecting the nefarious design of the pseudo-secularists—the Congress and the Communists—to install a foreign-born Italian as the Prime Minister of India, by toppling a government headed by the son of the soil, Vajpayee.

It's matter of great shame that we Indians couldn't produce a single Indian national by birth to head our country.

A.K. Dey, New Delhi

Passing cloud

From day one, Sangh Parivar and alliance parties gave frequent heart attacks to the BJP government (Jayalalitha in Delhi, 4—10 April). The leading tormen-



Mulayam Singh Yadav: exposed the pseudo-secularists

tor was Jayalalitha who even before the BJP formed the government, took her own time to give support letter. Last month when she predicted after a meeting with Sonia Gandhi in New Delhi that a political earthquake will occur, the earthquake truly struck India.

Many think that Jayalalitha is a dormant volcano ready to erupt at any time. But, it will be proved shortly that she is only a passing cloud, with lightning and thunder. To show her political prowess, let her stand alone in the coming elections without any alliance.

The people will come to know her ability then. She will have only one man—Subramanian Swamy—to comfort her.

V. Gangadaran, Coimbatore (Tamil Nadu)

The article under the caption Sense and non-sense of the Dunkel draft (8—14 March 1992) written by Dr Subramanian Swamy was published in this magazine. In the said article, Dr Swamy had made a comment against a question of Mr Vijay Kumar Malhotra, a prominent MP of BJP during a debate on "Uruguay Round of GATT negotiation" held in Parliament on 4.10.1991.

It transpired from the excerpt of the above debate that Mr Malhotra, MP never asked any question like "when you visited GATT, what did you see?" as mentioned by Dr Swamy in his article, neither was the comment of Dr Swamy, as stated in the article recorded in the proceeding. Since SUNDAY published an article by Dr Swamy, containing an incorrect imputation to Mr Vijay Kumar Malhotra, we regret the embarrassment caused to him. -Vir Sanghvi, Bijit Kumar Basu, Ananda Bazar Patrika Ltd

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Nishi Wadia
Industrialist



Navin Chawla
Writer

Contributed by Nilima Banerjee, Calcutta (West Bengal)

MILESTONES

APPOINTED: Shyamal Kumar Sen, acting Chief Justice, Calcutta High Court, as Governor of West Bengal. Assam Governor Lt-Gen. S.K. Sinha (retd) assumes additional charge of Arunachal Pradesh.

APPEARED: Sachin Tendulkar, ace batsman, on the cover of *Time*'s 17 May issue. He's the first Indian sportsperson to have come on the magazine's cover.

NAMED: London's Shree Swaminarayan Mandir, built by Swami



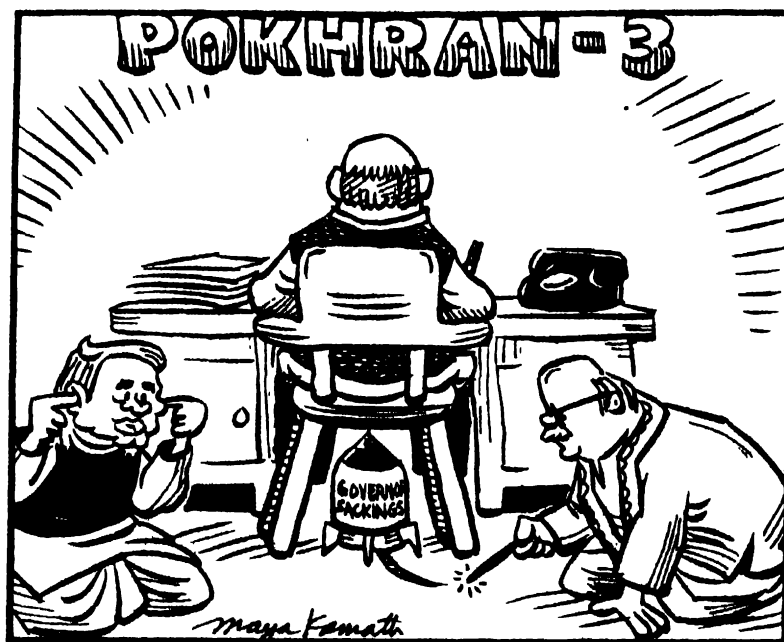
Maharaj in 1995, as one of the wonders of the 20th century by *Reader's Digest*.

EXPELLED: Gurcharan Singh Tohra, Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee chief, from the Shiromani Akali Dal for six years on charges of anti-party activities.

INVITED: Rajinder Sachar, former Delhi High Court CJ, to join the International Election Observation Mission, to oversee the second phase of Nepal's general elections.

CLEARED: Abdul Gani Lone, Jammu and Kashmir People's Conference chairperson, by the Centre to travel abroad for expert opinion on his heart ailment.

SIGHT & SOUND



MAYA KAMATH/THE ASIAN AGE

■ The stock market is rising, there is more wheat in the granaries than we can store, the economy is looking up and trade and industry is growing. Make sure, that in September, you vote for the party that thinks of the country first.

ATAL BEHARI VAJPAYEE, Prime Minister, at a rally in Bombay

■ Everyone has a time to die. Some people die of illness and others of accidents. Some people also die the way my husband died.

GLADYS STAINES, widow of Graham Staines, who was burnt alive with his two sons in Orissa. She has been running a leprosy home her husband set up

■ The CPM's history is written with the blood of the people.

M. VENKATIAH NAIDU, BJP general secretary and spokesman, reacting to West Bengal CM Jyoti Basu's earlier description of the BJP government as 'barbaric'



■ It needs a 'hero', an 'image' to go to the people. Hence, Congressmen keep going back to the Nehru-Gandhi family.

MANEKA GANDHI, Union minister of state for social justice and empowerment, describing the Congress as an empty bottle with a beautiful cap

■ The Indian National Congress has been transformed into the Catholic Congress ever since Sonia Gandhi assumed its leadership.

ASHOK SINGHAL, VHP working president

■ Tendulkar's a gun. An absolute gun.

MICHAEL ATHERTON, former England cricket captain

SEEN

SMILING DHARMARAJ

Of Pokhran and Pandavas



PEAK PERFORMANCE: Vajpayee addressing the rally

Last year, on 11 May, 'the Buddha was smiling' at Pokhran. This year on 11 May, it was 'caretaker' Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee who couldn't stop smiling at the impressive turnout at Shivaji Park in Bombay. The occasion: the first anniversary of India going nuclear.

The PM was the star performer in the absence of Bombay's very own showman, Shiv Sena boss Bal Thackeray, who had taken to bed with viral fever. Ignoring anti-nuke demonstrators a few feet away from the venue, he spoke on how India had revived its glory with the tests.

But he stressed that it was all meant for peaceful use. He also recalled the positive outcome of his bus ride to Lahore. The few dozen burka-clad women in the audience would have been a heartening sight had it not been for the fact that they were 'asked' by Sena volunteers to attend.

With the polls impending, it was but natural that the BJP and Sena leaders would make Sonia Gandhi their punching bag. The Sonia-bashing was started by Maharashtra deputy CM Gopinath Munde, who compared last month's political developments in the capital to a typical Hindi potboiler. The film, he said, had one *nayak*, Vajpayee, and three *khalnayaks*, er, actually *khalnayikas*: Sonia, Jayalalitha and Mayawati. "But, as in movies, the hero will emerge victorious in the end," predicted Munde.

Picking up from where his brother-in-law had left, I&B minister Pramod Mahajan gave a spirited performance attacking the "lady with Italian origins". "Vajpayee has been in public service since he was 15 years old; Sonia has not been an Indian citizen for 15 years," he began. "His oratory makes a dead man alive; she can't even speak Hindi properly. He is an MA in Hindi, she is not a proper graduate. He is in politics for public service; she is here for her accidental marriage to [Rajiv] Gandhi."

Then, Mahajan skilfully turned on the guilt tap. "We lost the vote of confidence by one vote and nobody is more at fault than the people of Maharashtra. You people could have elected one more MP, even *me*, and we would have been able to save the BJP government at the Centre," he said.

As the mythological icing on the Hindutva cake, there was BJP state president Suryabhan Wahande drawing parallels between characters from the Mahabharata and the current politicians. The people who brought down the government are the Kauravas. So, Arjun Singh is Duryodhan, Laloo Yadav is Dushyashan, Surjeet is Shakuni and Pawar is Shikhandi. And who, pray, are the Pandavas? Of course, the BJP and its allies.

Vajpayee is Dharmaraj Yudhisthir, Advani is Arjun and Fernandes the mighty Bhim! •

Kanjal Walle/Bombay

The people who brought down the government are the Kauravas. Vajpayee is Yudhisthir, Advani is Arjun and Fernandes the mighty Bhim!

SUSHMA'S SECRET SORROW

Mani-Talk scoops her missive to her mentor

Respected Param Poojya Advaniji,



I write to you in great sorrow. What has become of me? Only a few months ago, I was the darling of the BJP's crowds. It was they who coined the slogan: *Ab ki bari Atal Beha-*

ri/Agli bari behen hamari. The press called me "unbeatable": the Congress could not get a single volunteer to take me on; poor Ajay Maken was press-ganged into filing against me; if you were not a vegetarian, I would tell you I made *keema* out of him. No one gathered votes like I did, talking word-perfect Hindi to Hindi audiences, pure Punjabi to Punjabi gatherings, authentic Haryanvi to Haryanvi voters, faultless Urdu for the minorities, English as she is spoke for the *mlechcha*. When I danced the *gidda*, women came out in droves for the party. When I sang, it was a nice choice between my succeeding Lata Mangeshkar or succeeding Atalji. When I appeared on television, every middle-class family in the city switched on their TV sets.

I grew into the party's most telling

voice in Parliament, the mainstay of the Treasury Benches, holding not one but two key portfolios, marrying communications to communication. It was entirely against my wishes that I was kicked upstairs. I did not want to be chief minister. The *gaddi* was forced upon me. And that too when everything looked lost. I was told, only you can save the situation. I said even I couldn't. They said, if anyone can, it is you. I was told the party expected this small sacrifice of me. Less gently, I was reminded that I was a defector from the Janata Dal. I was left with no choice. I did as I was told.

AND FROM DAY ONE, the cards were stacked against me. How the Delhi BJP-wallahs loathed me. Why this Haryanvi? they asked. Are none of us *Dilli ke bashinde* any good? And what are we to tell the voters? That even if they don't vote for Sheila Dikshit, they're still going to get a woman as CM? They schemed. They plotted. They had already done enough to ensure the election was lost. They set to with enthusiasm to ensure that outcome so that I would be out of their hair.

For my part, I was not unhappy for myself to lose, because that would be the only way of getting back to Parliament, which is where I had left my heart. It was

only for the party that I hoped against hope that even now it might prove possible to pull off a miracle. I was nobbled right at the start. Someone leaked to the press my letter about the transfer of that awful income tax fellow. How was I to know that he was the blood-hound chasing Romesh Sharma? It was good of you to certify my innocence before the investigation into that charge had even begun. But you know these Congressmen—just because we said Romesh Sharma was a Congressman, they started asking why, in that case, I had taken the



I took my reverses with whatever equanimity I could summon. I smiled on TV and gave witty answers. I quit my Assembly seat and returned to resume my career in Parliament. To my shock, I was denied my portfolios. I was not given back even one ministry, let alone two.

Back to the back-benches, I was told, with a smirk. I almost expected to be told to stand in a corner. I kept my smile firmly in place

trouble to get the investigator removed. And started throwing hints that my husband as a lawyer had been hired to defend Sharma and his dealings. If I had not been the rival for CM, all this would have been brushed under the carpet. A bad name is all I got out of my few weeks as CM.

THEN CAME THE MURDER. Of a candidate in the election. And in Sahib Singh Verma's constituency at that. Worse luck, not some Congressman we could have ignored, but from our own

George's party. With Jaya Jaitly screaming her head off, or at any rate darkly hinting about how she suspected Verma's hand in it. What have I to do with murder, gentle, gentle me? I can bite my opponent's head off—that is only a debating technique. But getting a man killed? I get others to even swat the mosquitoes in my home. Yet, there I was, leading a party with a murder stuck to its name.

And what, I ask you, had I to do with the price of onions? I buy them, yes. I cook them, yes. I even occasionally eat



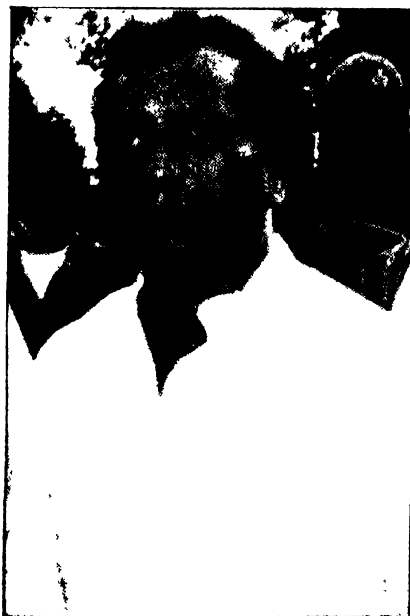
L.K. ADVANI: "I am on my way to becoming a BJP non-person. Tell me, Gurujil, what do I do?"

them — although it smells awful later. But I had no idea an entire election could be lost because someone forgot to import a few tonnes. I did what I could, but an entire consignment had to be rejected as inedible and, in any case, the voter only wanted to know why if I could import them now, we had not done so earlier? Should I have told them Madan Lal Khurana is from Sadar and all the big-time traders who made crores out of the crisis are his chums?

They ganged up against me, these three ex-CMs, Khurana and Sahib Singh and ex-chief exec. councillor, Vijay Malhotra. Each of them wanted the job I did not want. Then, what made the party force it on me? Just one little thing — Pramod Mahajan. He wanted my portfolios. So, he kicked me out of the Centre and ensured I would not have the standing to get my ministries back by sending me where I would be resoundingly defeated. Can you think of anything more sneaky?

I AM NOT SURE who did it, but on the morning of the voting, someone went round a slum in my Assembly constituency distributing sweets that made dozens ill. In no time at all, even as voters were on their way to the polling booths, the rumour spread that scores had died and many more were dying. That dished me. I just scraped through against an unknown. My victory was thus a humiliation.

Then came the results. I said our house has burnt down because we set it on fire with our own candle. My rivals were furious — precisely because what I had said was true. They had set our house on fire. If there had been the least unity in our ranks, the gap would have been much narrower. There would have been dignity in defeat. As it is, I do not know who exulted more at my defeat —



ROMESH SHARMA: "Just because we said Romesh Sharma was a Congressman, they started asking why, in that case, I had taken the trouble to get the investigator removed"

the Congress or our own Dilliwallahs.

I took my reverses with whatever equanimity I could summon. I smiled on TV and gave witty answers. I quit my Assembly seat and returned to resume my career in Parliament. To my shock, I was denied my portfolios. I was not given back even one ministry, let alone two. Back to the back-benches, I was told, with a smirk. I almost expected to be told to stand in a corner. I kept my smile firmly in place. There is Life After Political Death. I went to Pakistan. My Urdu was better than most Pakistanis. My *shair-o-shairi* was quoted and requested. Pak TV just could not take their cameras off me. And what a smash hit I was. Frankly, Benazir Bhutto was put in the shade; it was me the Pak press wanted. Perhaps, I thought to myself, this *agni pariksha* in exile is God's way of readying me for the foreign office. Out with Vasundhara, in with me. Better still, off with Jaswant, watch out Talbott, here I come. But nothing happened.

AND THEN CAME THE dissolution. I positioned myself right where my smiles and nods and asides would catch the cameras. They did. But not long enough to get us that one extra vote we needed. Doesn't matter, I said to myself, mine is the one seat the BJP is sure to get come September. And now what happens? The Gang of Three gang up against me, all set to do me down as they did last year. I thought up a lovely stratagem, so clever I thought I would not let even you into the game. I met you and told you of all the horrible things being done to me — for no fault other than that I am a damned sight better than all Three put together. You murmured your sympathies. So I dashed off a letter refusing to contest the next Lok Sabha election. I thought there would be a howl of protest. I thought voters in their millions would rise as one to demand I be restored. I thought I would be carried on a wave of the people's indignation to greater glory. Instead, there has been thundering silence. My refusal to contest has been accepted without demur. I am on my way to becoming a BJP non-person. Tell me, Gurujil, what do I do?

At your feet,
Sushma. •

Eight years after

We should not forget Rajiv Gandhi's contributions to the nation



After eight years of his assassination, it is high time we made an assessment of Rajiv Gandhi's performance as Prime Minister. He lost power in 1989 and after that the country has wit-

nessed six Prime Ministers. If one goes by the facts, it is obvious that Rajiv delivered the maximum in the minimum span of time.

In fact, he only got two-and-a-half years to work because the remaining years were spent in fire-fighting against V.P. Singh's brigade and the entire Opposition. There was so much political turmoil since July 1987, that he could not concentrate. The Opposition MPs did not allow Parliament to run properly and in 1989 they resigned. Many of his key people left and he was busy keeping his house in order.

But the people of India should not forget that he gave a number of gifts to the nation. These were the telecom revolution, computerisation and the technology mission. He also conceived economic reforms which were later implemented by Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh. The manifesto which he prepared in 1991 before his death was dominated by ideas of economic reforms.

Today, people can make phone calls from small towns to anywhere in the world. Lakhs of people got employment through PCOs and the burden and dependence on post and telegraph was reduced. Growth in the telecom sector has been really achieved and we are catching up with a number of other nations.

Earlier, nobody was happy with the telecom services. Though there are some people who give the credit for it to Sam Pitroda, they are wrong. The entire telecom revolution was conceived by Rajiv, and Pitroda only implemented a part of it on his directions. When the Janata Dal came to power, it put a brake on this revolution which was again initiated by Sukh Ram, on the same line

which Rajiv had prepared.

When Rajiv had launched computerisation, a number of politicians and mediamen had blamed him for abetting unemployment and ridiculed him. Today, India has done wonders in computerisation. Millions of youths not only got employment but have also good job opportunities abroad as software engineers. India is earning foreign exchange

that Rajiv took bribe. No evidence has been shown so far of his involvement. V.P. Singh, even after ten years, could not trace his Swiss bank account number which he had announced at a Patna rally.

On the Airbus purchase, too, nothing was found against him after the investigations. In fact, a case can be registered against V.P. Singh for grounding the fleet costing several hundred crores to



**Rajiv Gandhi:
misunderstood**

in huge volumes because of computerisation.

The technology mission has been equally beneficial to the nation. It has not only solved the water problem in many areas, but also pushed development in the field of science and technology. Today India is number one in remote-sensing satellite. We are also doing wonderfully in defence research and development.

Rajiv was criticised for his decisions to purchase Bofors guns and Airbus 320s. V.P. Singh took the maximum mileage out of both the issues. In ten years, nothing has come out of the Bofors investigation which could prove

the national exchequer.

Interestingly, now the Indian Airlines people are saying that Rajiv bought the best aircraft for domestic airlines and today it is running because of those planes. Similarly, all the army officials are praising the performance of the Bofors gun. This is the only gun which is working at Siachen. The army is pressurising the government to lift the ban on Bofors so that spares can also be purchased.

It is most unfortunate that in spite of all these facts, poor Rajiv Gandhi was misunderstood and suffered unnecessarily. Let's pay homage to him on his eighth death anniversary. •

THE CHALLENGE

Sonia Gandhi and the revolt: what happens now?

It took eight years for Congressmen to get Sonia Gandhi to say yes. And seven minutes for her to turn it all down. It was on the evening of 15 May that Sharad Pawar, Tariq Anwar and P.A. Sangma's letter reached Sonia. The three Congress Working Committee (CWC) members stated quite categorically that they did not think it fit that anyone other than a natural-born Indian should become Prime Minister. This was something that the BJP and its allies had been claiming all along.

This was also something that Sonia had discussed with her colleagues just a couple of hours ago at a CWC meeting at her residence. Although the meeting had been called to finalise the list of candidates for the Goa Assembly elections, it was Sonia who raised the issue of her foreign birth. She pointed out that the BJP had made this into a campaign issue and that it was something that the party would have to deal with during its strategy sessions. But, she told her partymen, she would "fight till the end". At the same time, Sonia did not know what she was up against.

As expected, Arjun Singh was quick to reassure her that her place of birth was not an issue. He pointed to the fact that the Assembly elections held last year had proved this. The BJP had tried to make it an issue even then, but the people of India turned it down, he said.

That was when P.A. Sangma spoke up. He contradicted Singh and said that Sonia's foreign origins was fast becoming the BJP's main electoral plank. And then, he turned to Sonia and said that the

party had some difficulty in countering the BJP's propaganda since they knew very little about Sonia. For instance, when did she give up her Italian citizenship? And so on.

Sonia had barely the time to comprehend what Sangma had just said, when Pawar joined in. He said that more and more people were asking the Congress why, in a country of 980 million people, they could not find an Indian as its prime

ministerial candidate.

It was R.K. Dhawan who then took up the cudgel on her behalf. He asked the working committee to draft a resolution reposing faith in Sonia's leadership. But Tariq Anwar thwarted him, and even Dr Manmohan Singh pointed out that they had already passed such a resolution. Where was the need to keep repeating themselves, he asked plaintively.

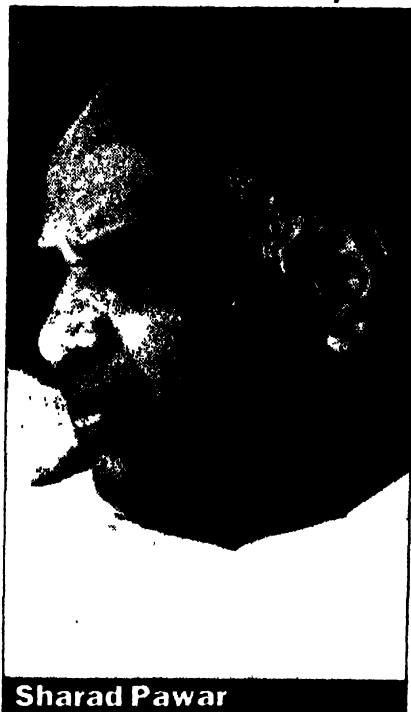
The meeting ended with a resolution (drafted by Arjun Singh) condemning the BJP for its attack on Sonia. In fact, after the discussion on Sonia's origins was over and done with, the meeting went on quite amicably. Possible candidates for the Goa elections were discussed and CWC members ribbed Pawar saying that he had managed to get quite a few of his candidates on the list.

After which, most of the members left for home, eager to watch the India versus South Africa match on television. Sangma asked Pilot to come and have a cup of coffee with him but since it was well past two o'clock, Pilot replied that he was hungry and wanted to go home and eat lunch instead.

An ardent cricket fan, Pawar stayed back to have a few words with Sonia. He told her that he would be leaving for Madras on the 17th where he would discuss a possible poll alliance with Jayalalitha.

There was no more mention of Sonia's foreign origins. Everyone thought that the matter had been settled.

Until that evening.



Sharad Pawar

"I was the first to realise the potentials of tying up with an Italian"

While stunned Congressmen met at Pranab Mukherjee's house to dis-

"Though born in a foreign land, I chose India as my country. I am Indian. And I will remain so till my last breath. India is my motherland, dearer to me than my own life...I came into the service of my party not for a position of power. But because the party faced a challenge to its very existence. And I could not stand idly by"



The Revolt

Sharad Pawar, Tariq Anwar and P.A. Sangma write a letter

Last fortnight, Sharad Pawar attended a press conference at the Women's Press Club. And soon, the inevitable question cropped up: would Sonia Gandhi be the Congress party's prime ministerial candidate? By now Pawar was used to this question. It cropped up at each and every press conference. The problem here was not so much that there was a doubt as to whether the Congress president would get to be Prime Minister. The uncertainty prevailed as to what Sharad Pawar's stance on that question would be. "Of course she is our candidate," he admonished the reporter. "Why should there be any doubt? She is the CPP



P.A. Sangma



Tariq Anwar



Sharad Pawar

(Congress Parliamentary Party) leader, and as you all know, the CPP leader is the prime ministerial candidate."

Then came the next question.

"Are you a candidate?"

By now Pawar had learnt to deal with the press. He laughed and said, "As it is I am in enough trouble. Why do you want to get me into more trouble?" And everyone smiled in sympathy.

A week later, Pawar shot off his missive to Sonia Gandhi. The letter, co-signed by two other CWC members P.A. Sangma and Tariq Anwar stated quite categorically that while they did not mind Sonia leading the Congress party, they were not quite sure whether a person born of foreign origin was fit to be this country's Prime Minister.

"It is not possible that a country of 980 million, with a wealth of education, competence and ability, can have anyone other than an Indian, born of Indian soil, to head its government," said the four-page missive.

The note was dated 15 May 1995 and was delivered to all the CWC members on that very evening. At a time when most of the country was at its patriotic best, glued to the India versus South Africa cricket match on television.

Most CWC members were in shock. Oscar Fernandes, party general secretary, got a call from 16 Janpath, asking him to schedule a CWC meeting the next day. However, when he called Sangma at 11.45 pm, Sangma

"It is not possible that a country of 980 million, with a wealth of education, competence and ability, can have anyone other than an Indian, born of Indian soil, to head its government"

told him that he was leaving for the United States by the 6.45 am flight the next day to attend his son's convocation. And asked for the meeting to be rescheduled for the 26th. He, however, said that he could not cancel the trip. Sharad Pawar had already left for Pune.

Tariq Anwar defended their stand. He pointed out that they were merely voicing a concern which many of them felt. And merely writing a letter did not amount to anti-party activities. After all, their's was a democratic party; and they were not amongst those who mouthed psychophantic platitudes in public but said just the opposite behind Sonia's back.

While Anwar can take credit for being up-front and honest, the same does not apply to Pawar. He has, time and again, reiterated that Sonia should become the next Prime Minister. In fact, he was instrumental in not only nominating her for party president but even forwarded her name for the post of CPP chief. At least, Anwar walked out of the CWC meeting that decided to replace Sitaram Kesri with Sonia.

This is the first time the Maratha has launched a frontal attack. And this time, it does not look as if he will back down. For, when he was informed that Sonia had resigned because of his letter, Pawar replied that he had never questioned her credentials as party president. "About her responsibility as party president, we have never raised any objection," he said. "We did not ask for the resignation of Sonia Gandhi as party president," he added. And reiterated that his demand was only limited to the question of the posts of Prime Minister, President and vice-president of India.

However, the letter does question Sonia on other grounds than her place of birth: "A person who is to take the reins of this country needs a large measure of experience and understanding of public life. Why the founders of our party insisted that people who aspired for higher positions should first spend time working their way up."

At Sonia's wedding reception, when she said that her husband had been a leader of the Congress party, she said that she had been working her way up.



cuss the 'letter bomb', Sonia stayed at home. She had already decided her course of action. And was ready with her reply. At Mukherjee's residence, a gleeful Arjun Singh announced that Pawar and Co. would have to be expelled. M.L. Fotedar and Dhawan agreed with him. Others, however, advised caution.

Later, two Sonia-loyalists called on Mukherjee. Among other things, they asked him to make sure that Arjun Singh did not brief the press that evening. Mukherjee laughed, and assured them that he would deal with the press. At that time, Mukherjee was not aware of the historic nature of the announcement he would have to make.

At 7.30 pm that evening, Sonia walked into the conference room at 24 Akbar Road with a blue folder in her hand. Before anyone could raise the issue of Pawar's letter, she opened the folder and took out a letter of her own. Although a few Congressmen had an inkling of what was in store, they were stunned nevertheless. It was an emotional moment, and even Arjun Singh wept when he heard what Sonia had to say.

"Though born in a foreign land, I chose India as my country. I am Indian. And I will remain so till my last breath. India is my motherland, dearer to me than my own life....," the lines were reminiscent of her mother-in-law's words when she pledged the last drop of blood to this country.

Her speech over, Sonia told her colleagues that she would leave the meeting, so that they could discuss what she had just said. Tears in his eyes, Sitaram Kesri caught hold of her hand and begg-

It was a very hurt Sonia Gandhi who handed in her resignation letter. Those who applaud her move as a brilliant political ploy are missing the point. True, her resignation has taken the wind out of Pawar's sails. But, this was not a political decision. It was an emotional one

ed her not to leave. "Chhodiye Kesriji," she pleaded. He did not let go. "Tum meri beti jaisi ho, mat jao," he begged.

But Sonia had taken her decision.

Later that night, Congressmen trooped into 10 Janpath. But Sonia did not change her stand. Embarrassed CWC members shuffled uncomfortably as both Arjun Singh and M.L. Fotedar wept boisterously. Even Sonia looked a bit uncomfortable.

Later, two Congress chief ministers, Digvijay Singh and Ashok Gehlot tendered their resignation to her. "We won because of you," said the Madhya Pradesh chief minister. "We cannot continue without you." But still, Sonia said nothing.

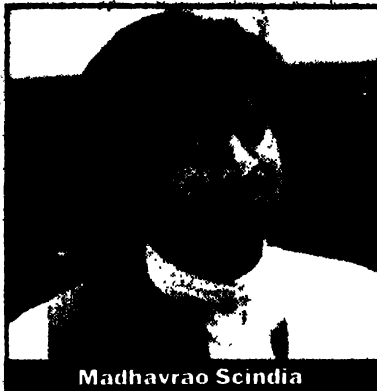
She later told friends it was not just the three of them. There were others

The night Sonia RESIGNED

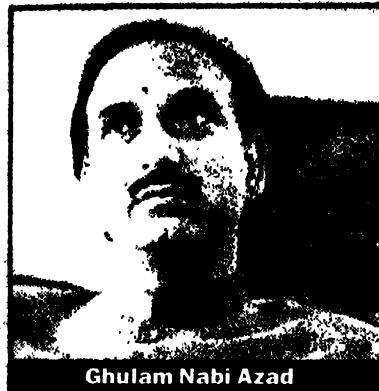
Congressmen begged and pleaded but she said no



Pranab Mukherjee



Madhavrao Scindia



Ghulam Nabi Azad

Sonia Gandhi walked up the garden path that connected 10 Janpath to the Congress headquarters. She smiled at reporters, but said nothing as she went in to attend the party's working committee meeting on the evening of 16 May.

Seven minutes later, she walked out again. When startled reporters tried to question her, she said, "The spokesperson will brief you." And left.

It was left to a weeping Ambika Soni, a red-faced Pranab Mukherjee and a sombre Madhavrao Scindia to break the news: the Congress President had just resigned. And predictably, the Congress Working Committee (CWC) had rejected her resignation.

Then followed a night of long drama. Youth Congress workers camped outside 10 Janpath and shouted slogans of *Sonia Lao, Desh Bachao* and *Bhukhe Marjayenge, Sonia ko Layenge*. Fortunately,

Arjun Singh did not have enough time to mobilise his Arjun Rath (the tempo that invariably drives upto 10 Janpath whenever there is a crisis and blares its hit song: *Kaha gaya Rajiv Gandhi hamara...desh ka dulara, aankhon ka tara?* Perhaps for once, he was also stunned by what had just happened.

And soon, working committee members got into their ambassadors and rushed over to placate Sonia. A Mahila Congress worker wept uncontrollably and refused to let the CWC members take their cars into 10 Janpath. "Let them walk," she said and cried some more for the benefit of the TV cameras. (Unfortunately for the lady, most of the reporters recalled that she had enacted the same drama when Narasimha Rao was the party president and was being targeted by Arjun Singh and Co.)

Inside, however, there were no theatrics. Sonia Gandhi met her visi-

tors courteously, but had little to say to them.

"We told her that we owed the recent victory at the Assembly elections to her," said Ghulam Nabi Azad.

"We also reminded her that it was because of her that the Congress got nearly 150 seats during the last elections," he added. Another working committee member, R.K. Dhawan, pointed out that things like this (Sharad Pawar's letter) happen. "Even Indiraji had to face such situations," he reminded her gently.

Still Sonia said nothing.

"We told her about the telegrams that have come in for her support. We told her about the supporters demonstrating outside. But she has made up her mind. It is now upto us to try and convince her to change it," Ambika Soni told reporters.

Then, an aghast-faced Ahmed Patel walked out. "She is firm," he said. "But we will try again tomorrow," he added hopefully.

"We told her that we owed the recent victory at the Assembly elections to her...it was because of her that the Congress got nearly 150 seats during the last elections"

Ghulam Nabi Azad



such as Pilot who had raised this issue. By then it was clear — to the few who had any doubts — that she was not resorting to cheap gimmicks. She was genuinely hurt. After all, she had not begged Congressmen to make her party chief. And when she did give in to their pleadings, it was at a time when the Congress was at its lowest ebb.

On the eve of the 1998 polls the Congress party was not expected to get even 90 seats. Vote-catchers such as Mamata Banerjee had left the party. It was at this point that Sonia stepped in and agreed to campaign for the Congress. Later, when the party got as many as 141 seats, she was asked to take over as the Congress president. As she said in her letter, "I came into the service of my party, not for a position of power. But because the party faced a challenge to its very existence. And I could not stand idly by."

No wonder she felt cheated.

By now it's clear that the letter was not written in one Saturday afternoon. The three rebels had been plotting for some time now; only 10 Janpath strategists failed to recognise the signs.

It is easy to understand why Pawar wrote the letter. He had been chaffing and complaining for sometime now. His supporters say that the only reason why

If Sonia is as power-hungry as her detractors make her out to be, then why did she refuse to take over the party in 1991? And continued to do so for the next six years? It was only when the party was in danger of being wiped out, that Sonia agreed to campaign

the Maratha had agreed to support Sonia was that he had been given to understand that he would be made Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP) chief. Sonia loyalists deny that there was ever such an agreement. In any event, they argue, it was Pawar who proposed Sonia's name as the CPP chief. Why did he not contest at that time?

That was the beginning of the end for Pawar. Although he still retained his old job as leader of Opposition, he enjoyed little power within the party framework. Instead, it was P. Shiv Shanker and P.J.

Kurien who arrived each morning with a list of speakers forwarded by 10 Janpath and decided what the party would raise in Parliament.

However, it was during the crisis in April that Pawar made his first few moves. Ironically, the party, recognising his closeness to Mulayam Singh Yadav, deputed him to talk to the Samajwadi Party leader. In retrospect, few are surprised that Yadav failed to come around. "God knows what deal he struck with Mulayam then," says a CWC member.

In fact, Pawar was noticeably absent from the dais, when Hussein Dalvi, the Samajwadi Party chief in Bombay joined the Congress. At that time, Amar Singh chuckled and promised, "*Iska badla hum zaroor leyenge*." His implication was that the Samajwadi Party would break away Pawar in return.

And later, when it came to deciding on poll alliances, the party once again turned to Pawar. The Maratha was sent to Madras to work out a deal with Jayalalitha. The two enjoyed a four-course meal (in fact Pawar did not realise that the lady would lay on such a sumptuous banquet for him and over-ate during the first course. Then, as he told his friends, he had a problem finishing the rest!). But clearly, he saved the dessert

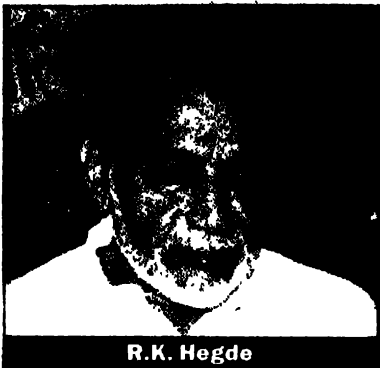
Pawar revolts — finally

Understanding Pawar's gameplan

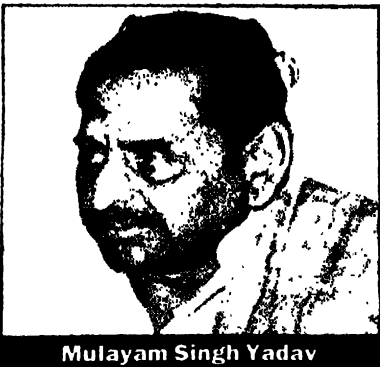
It now makes sense. Sharad Pawar's letter — and its timing — answers many of the questions left unsolved during the crisis in April. For instance, why did Mulayam Singh Yadav and Amar Singh not support a Congress government led by Sonia Gandhi? Why did they not listen to their old friend Comrade Harkishen Singh Surjeet of the



Mamata Banerjee



R.K. Hegde



Mulayam Singh Yadav

CPM and throw their weight behind the secular forces?

One can also now read between the lines of Mulayam's triumphant reaction to Sharad Pawar's letter asking the Congress president to suggest an amendment to the Constitution of India whereby the offices of Prime Minister, President and vice-president can only be held by natural-born Indian citizens. "I had foretold that this would happen," Yadav told press reporters triumphantly.

Had he indeed foretold as he so quaintly puts it, or had he been forewarned?

For the last year, Mulayam has been watching a stronger, resurgent Congress with alarm. Especially after the conclave at Panchmarhi where it was decided that the party would not go in for alliances at the state-level. So, when the Congress asked for his support (from the outside) to form a government at the Centre, Mulayam Singh Yadav was in a fix. He did not want to help the Congress, yet he could not be seen strengthening the communal forces.

It was probably then that he got in touch with his old friend, Sharad Pawar. No one is quite sure if the two have worked out a deal, but an alliance would benefit both. It has worked before in the 1998 polls in Maharashtra. And besides, now both had a common enemy: a Congress party led by Sonia Gandhi.

The BJP, however, is not happy with the timing of the revolt. Its party strategists say that Pawar should have waited and broken away after the poll dates had been announced. That would have had more of an impact on the electorate. But Pawar has a time-table of his own. And for that, he needs the four months before the elections.

Ever since Sonia took over, Pawar has felt marginalised by 10 Janpath. He knows that he has his future in a Congress with Sonia at the helm, and Arjun Singh by her side. So, if he has

to move out, it has to be now. If, after the elections — and this is a strong possibility — the Congress came to power, it would be difficult to persuade his MPs to leave the party and possible ministerial berths.

So he had to act now. At a time when he can build an alternative front of his own, and tempt other Congressmen to join him. He will probably tie up with Mulayam Singh Yadav; Mamata Banerjee has already indicated that she is waiting for Pawar's phone call. Other Third Front leaders who are uncomfortable with joining the BJP-led National Democratic Front could also go in for an electoral understanding with this lot. Such as Chandrababu Naidu and R.K. Hegde.

Pawar also knows that his strength lies in Maharashtra. The reason why his revolt has been taken more seriously than Arjun Singh's Congress (Tiwari) is that, unlike Singh, he is a mass-base leader. During the last elections, not only did he win his own seat, he won 33 others for the Congress.

Which is why he needs to regroup at the state level; especially with Maharashtra heading for polls at the Assembly level. It would be easy to win over his old allies: the Republican Party of India and the Samajwadi Party. But this is not enough.

However, Pawar knows that the BJP is uncomfortable with the Shiv Sena. Especially at a time when the party is trying to dilute its fundamental image and opting for a more user-friendly outlook. In such a scenario, a tie-up between a softer BJP (at least that is what Pawar will tell his supporters) and the Maratha makes sense.

Hence, the urgency. Because if Pawar needs to get all his alliances in place, he needs to act now. And what better way to win friends amongst his party's enemies, than to raise one of their own politicians, Sonia Gandhi, high in a foreign land?



Pawar knows that the BJP is uncomfortable with the Shiv Sena at a time when the party is trying to dilute its image. A tie-up between a softer BJP (at least that is what Pawar will tell his supporters) and the Maratha makes sense

for the last — for now Congressmen are not sure quite what Pawar spoke to Jayalalitha about. "Was he striking a deal with her for the Congress party or for himself?" asked a Tamil Nadu Congressman.

Given this background, it is easy to understand his now-infamous speech at the CII, where he said that the next elections would throw up a fractured Lok Sabha. Although he assured Ram Pradhan and other Sonia-loyalists that he had been misquoted, he also sent a bound copy of his speech to various newspaper offices. From which it was clear that he had not been misquoted.

While looking for new allies, Pawar also carried on a sustained campaign with the media. First, he took a party of journalists to Baramati, his constituency. There he took great pains to establish his credentials as a grassroots-level leader. He also took to entertaining journalists in small groups. Invariably, he cracked the same joke at each meeting. While serving wine from his vineyards in Maharashtra, he would point out that he had tied up with an Italian firm to produce wine. And then, he would smile and add: "I was the first to realise the potentials of tying up with an Italian."

However, it was only a fortnight ago that the trio showed their hand. Two weeks ago, Sangma held a small dinner at his house. Besides Anwar and Pawar, he invited Santosh Mohan Dev and Jitendra Prasada. The other two were



DIGVIJAY SINGH: "We won because of you," said the Madhya Pradesh chief minister to Sonia when he tendered his resignation. "We cannot continue without you"

invited to throw in their lot with them. Both refused.

In fact, it is a trifle ironic that the three CWC members approached by the trio were the most vocal in expressing their loyalty for Sonia. Jitendra Prasada was the first CWC member to tender his resignation. Rajesh Pilot has made it clear that while he was ready to express his views within the party forum, once the CWC took a decision, he would abide by it "like a loyal soldier".

The third CWC member approached by Pawar was his old friend Ghulam Nabi Azad. Which perhaps explains why Azad fell ill and stayed away from the 15 May meeting. However, he was soon up and about on his feet, telling television cameras that "the strictest disciplinary action should be taken against Pawar".

Other Pawar-loyalists were quick to follow suit. Interestingly, they were also the first to give statements in favour of Sonia Gandhi. These include Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, Praful Patel, Gurudas Kamat and P.C. Chacko. However, Pawar found a friend amongst his enemies: out of the seven MPs who attend-





P.A. SANGMA: He had said that he did not need to do any 'chamchagiri' of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty; when asked whether Sonia would be the party's prime ministerial candidate, he had replied that this was something that the party would have to decide

ed Pawar's show of strength in Maharashtra, Pawar's former *bete noir*, Sudhakarrao Naik was one of them. In fact, Sushil Kumar Shinde, another Pawar-baiter, got a call from one of his supporters in Maharashtra when he saw Naik at Pawar's meeting.

By now Pawar has little option but to break away from the Congress. But it is clear that this is something he had planned all along. Apart from Mulayam and Jayalalitha, he is also in constant touch with George Fernandes. From all accounts, he will form a regional party in Maharashtra, and do a deal either with Mulayam (the two had a meeting in Bombay on two days after Pawar shot off his letter) or go in for some sort of an understanding with the BJP.

One is not quite sure why P.A. Sangma signed the letter (which, incidentally, he had drafted). Sonia-loyalists say that he saw himself as a prime mini-

sterial candidate and had realised that with Sonia in place there was little chance of this happening. Sangma, had, however, been dropping hints about his discontent with the present set-up.

In fact, two months ago, during a television interview (*Ru-ba-ru*), he had boasted that he had never asked for a ticket from the Congress. And that he did not need the party to campaign for him. He was quite capable of winning the seat on his own. And that he did not need to do any 'chamchagiri' of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty. When asked whether Sonia Gandhi would be the party's prime ministerial candidate, he had replied that this was something that the party would have to decide.

Later, he was called to 10 Janpath and asked to clarify some of the statements that he had made during the interview.

Tariq Anwar was not so vocal. But, he has always been upfront and honest in his politics. There is little denying that the former general-secretary had been sidelined in the current set-up. It did not help that he is a stranger to Arjun Singh's style of coterie politics.

Moreover, Anwar is aware that his survival in Bihar depended on Laloo Yadav rather than the Congress. He has always been gracious in acknowledging that he won his present Lok Sabha seat

with Laloo's aid. Which is perhaps why he had no qualms in signing the letter. Unfortunately for him, Laloo Yadav has established close contacts with the Congress. He refers to Sonia as 'beti'. More to the point, he needs the Congress.

Anwar, however, could join the Samajwadi Party. That way, Laloo could easily help him out in Bihar. In fact, two weeks ago, Anwar's loyal aide, Shahid Siddiqui had left the Congress to join the Samajwadi Party. Perhaps, he was paving the way for his mentor.

For the time being, however, the Congress party has taken no action against the rebels. The CWC has rejected their letter, but there is no talk of disciplinary action against them. In the best traditions of inner-party democracy, Pranab Mukherjee told the press that "writing a letter to the Congress president and asking for its consideration is the right of a CWC member". The idea is to marginalise the three within the party.

As for the actual martyr, Congressmen are not quite sure how to deal with the situation at hand. By now it is quite apparent that Sonia is very serious about her resignation. It is not a cheap stunt — regardless of what the BJP may say. The rabble-rousers have forgotten that way back in 1991, when the Congress offered her the party on a platter she had refused. At that time the Congress was sure to form the government, and Sonia would have been the logical choice as Prime Minister.

So, if she is as power-hungry as her detractors make her out to be, then why did she refuse to take over the party in 1991? And continued to do so for the next six years? It was only when the party was in danger of being wiped out, that Sonia agreed to campaign. And later, when she became Congress president, she made it clear that her priority was not to cobble together a coalition and stake claim (she could have become Prime Minister even in March last year) but instead to revitalise the party.

Hence, it was a very hurt Sonia Gandhi who handed in her resignation letter. Those who applaud her move as a brilliant political ploy are missing the point. True, her resignation has taken the wind out of Pawar's sails. But, this was not a political decision. It was an emotional one.

Which is why she is not going to change her mind for a long, long time. •

Priya Sahgal and Rajiv Shukla/New Delhi



NEWSBEAT

The Case is Closed

But the controversy surrounding Rajiv Gandhi's assassination remains

Last Tuesday, when Supreme Court confirmed the death sentence of four of the 26 accused and acquitted 19 others in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case, there was a belief — hawked aggressively by a section of the media — that the controversies surrounding the killing of the Congress leader too would end. Such hopes have been belied, as Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, after all, is politics.

A human bomb killed Rajiv Gandhi on 21 May, 1991, at Sriperumbudur. Investigation by the Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) led by D.R. Karthikeyan had held the Tamil Tigers responsible for



Rajiv at Sriperumbudur, minutes before the explosion

the dastardly crime. This line of investigation was severely tested by the Jain Commission that went to the wider conspiracy behind the assassination. Post-Rajiv, the Congress has not been able to reconcile with his assassination as grave questions of cover-up and involvement of foreign hands have been raised from time to time about the lackadaisical manner in which the Narasimha Rao government presided over the probe. Sonia Gandhi's *raison de etre* too has been the issues surrounding her husband's assassination and an endorsement of her entry into politics. With Sonia as the Congress president, the judgement is likely to reopen a Pandora's box of competing accusations.

The Supreme Court's judgement, delivered by Justice K.T. Thomas, Justice D.P. Wadhwa and Justice Quadri, probably was the trigger that revived all the conspiracy theories that seemed to shroud the heinous murder. The SC judgement not

only questions one of the premises of SIT's thesis that the assassination of Rajiv was an act of terrorism, but it also chose to acquit 19 of the accused who had been earlier sent to the gallows by the special court at Poonamallee. The court also ordered the immediate release of all the 19 accused who, in its opinion, had served their sentences during 8 long years of incarceration.

One of those acquitted by the apex court, Thambi Anna, was charged by the SIT for providing the finances for the assassination. The acquittal has resurrected the fundamental issue — which has been deliberated at length by the much-reviled Jain Commission — about who financed the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi.

One of the released accused, Ranganath, provided grist to the long-held fears that Rajiv Gandhi's killing was allegedly masterminded by godman Chandra Swami. He also claimed that he had informed the SIT boss, Karthikeyan, about the involvement of Chandra Swami but his charges were not tak-



Sonia Gandhi: her *raison d'être* has been the issues surrounding her husband's assassination

en seriously. Ranganath also promised to reveal all. Expectedly, both the BJP and the Congress gave precedence to Ranganath's statement and demanded further probe in his allegations by the Multi-Disciplinary Monitoring Agency (MDMA) constituted by the government after submission of the Jain Commission report. The Congress Working Committee (CWC) also demanded that Ranganath should get protection, as many of the key witnesses of the case like Shanmugham and Dixon had died under mysterious circumstances. The fat was truly on fire.

This new twist to the eight-year-old assassination has brought the focus firmly on an agency languishing due to indifference and absence of political will. The SC order, CBI officials feel, would strengthen the MDMA in carrying out its mandate.

It may be recalled that Justice M.C. Jain had recommended further investigations into:

■ The 22 accused who for some reason had been ignored by the SIT

■ The cover-up by various government agencies

■ The extradition of three absconding accused, Prabhakaran, Pottu Amman and chief of LTTE women's wing Akila

■ The role of Godman Chandra Swami

Highly placed sources in the home ministry inform that the SC judgement would contribute in leavening a sense of belief in the MDMA. After all, the SC confirmed the death sentence of Perarivalan, alias Arivu, for helping one-eyed Jack, Sivarasan, in putting together the explosive device. Arivu, according to SIT investigations, had bought "two nine-volt batteries" that were used to blast the bomb. MDMA, therefore, would have a case against those who were responsible for procuring the RDX and other explosives — a part of the investigation that for some reason was not touched by the SIT.

Kumaran Padmanabha, alias KP, who is in Jain's list of accused, is alleged to be the main arms procurer for the LTTE who somehow escaped SIT's charge-sheet. It was KP's links with Saudi arms dealer Adnan Khashoggi that first gave hints of a possible link of the killers with Chandra Swami. With the way the SC has given importance to the evidence against Murugan and Santhan, it is unlikely that KP can breathe easy.

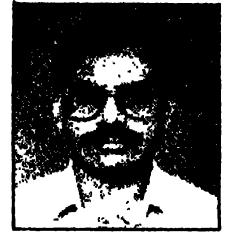
By this yardstick, life imprisonment for another accused, Santhan, would provide the reason for the MDMA to go after other accused who committed similar crimes. Santhan was accused of procuring various inputs for the assassins, passing information and acting as courier. Others in the list of accused — prepared by Jain Commission — like Nixon, Kanthan and Ramnan fall in this category.

Murugan, whose hanging was confirmed by the SC, was charged for indoctrinating and cultivating Indian accused, Nalini, and sending illegal messages. Baby Subramaniam, a member of the LTTE politburo, who figures in Jain's list, too, has played a similar role.

In spite of the role played by the LTTE leadership in Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, the SC refuses to recognise it as an act of terrorism. Justice Thomas, along with other judges, gave several reasons for setting aside the conviction and the sentence passed by the trial court in Madras under Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA). The conviction under TADA was the cornerstone of the SIT probe.

Justice Thomas noted that "nothing else other than an editorial in a journal of the LTTE and a reported speech of Prabhakaran in April 1990 is proved in the case either from the utterances of the LTTE top-brass or from the writings edited by them that someone wanted to strike fear in the government either of the Centre or of any state". Justice Thomas further said: "in view of paucity of materials, it is difficult to conclude that the conspirators intended, at any time, to overawe the Government of India as by law established or to strike terror

Even though the four accused have been sentenced to death, the acquittal of 19 is perceived to be a major setback for the Special Investigation team



SIVARASAN



MURUGAN



NALINI

V. Prabhakaran: The Supreme Court has identified him as a key conspirator

in the people of India". Thomas observed that "there is no such evidence that any such activity was done for the purpose of killing any police personnel". Due to this, judgement could not "sustain the conviction of appellants for offences under Section 3 or 4 of TADA".

However, the SC Bench upheld, on the basis of the copious documents presented as evidence by the SIT, that "there was not even a speck of doubt in our mind that the criminal conspiracy to murder Rajiv Gandhi was hatched by at least four persons comprising of Velupillai Prabhakaran, Pottu Amman, Sivarasan and Akila".

Justice Thomas, contrary to the views held by other brother judges, did not want to condemn Nalini, a prime accused, to death by hanging. Reasons forwarded by Thomas were humanitarian, as he did not want Nalini's son, residing with her husband Murugan's mother in Australia, to be orphaned. Murugan too had been sentenced to death. Other judges did not agree with this contention as the assassination too was committed by the female human-bomb Dhanu.

Justice Thomas conceded that the prosecution had succeeded in proving Nalini as one of the conspirators and participant in the act of assassination of Rajiv Gandhi.

Providing a justification for pronouncing death sentences to the four accused, the judgement observed that "Sivarasan wanted Santhan to keep his two bags and conceal them in Kottivakkom". Santhan helped LTTE activists to escape from the clutches of the police. He is also accused of handing over a wireless set to LTTE activist Suresh Master at the house of Vijayan.

Regarding Murugan, the judgement takes into cognisance his confession that he rendered a "lot of help in carrying out

the target of conspiracy — that is, the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi though he did not go to Sriperumbudur". Murugan's confession was responsible for revealing the involvement of LTTE's leadership in the crime.

Arivu, who too has been sentenced to death, was responsible for mobilising assorted inputs for Sivarasan that was later used in rigging up the explosive device. Arivu had further confessed that on 20 May, he had gone to Bhagyanathan's house where he found Sivarasan, Nalini, Murugan and Haribabu. Sivarasan told them about the meeting of Rajiv Gandhi. Arivu thereupon gave a colour film to Haribabu. The SC Bench relying on "confession" and other related evidence reached the conclusion that Arivu was actively involved in the criminal conspiracy to assassinate Rajiv Gandhi.

Even though the four accused have been sentenced to death, the acquittal of 19 is perceived to be a major setback for SIT. At the time the Poonamallee court condemned the 24 accused to gallows, SIT chief Karthikeyan had claimed vindication for investigation conducted by the agency. Surprisingly, the latest SC order has not fazed him. He has drawn solace from the observations of Justice Wadhwa who congratulates SIT for an excellent job. But the conclusions drawn from the SC order hardly cover the SIT or Karthikeyan in glory. The acquittal of the 19 accused is clearly an evidence of gaps in probe. The SIT does not dwell at all on the two key questions: who provided the funds for the assassination and, secondly, who procured the extremely costly white RDX for Dhanu? The answer to these questions, many in the investigating agencies reckon, can help in understanding the contours of this complex conspiracy. •

Sanjay Kapoor/New Delhi

Political realignments in Tamil Nadu have left G.K. Moopanar and his TMC in a quandary

G.K. Moopanar is a deeply disturbed man after the latest round of political realignments in Tamil Nadu. Loyal to the Gandhi family, he harbours a deep hatred for Jayalalitha, the AIADMK chief. And his party, the Tamil Maanila Congress — a breakaway faction of the Congress — cannot also align with the newly-formed DMK-BJP combine. It's a classic dilemma: to a certain extent he is willing to compromise; but, the question is, how far?

He isn't alone in his hatred. The TMC top brass, led by former finance minister P. Chidambaram and S.R. Balasubramanian, are unanimous on one point: that they should have nothing to do with the AIADMK. Putting their dislike in perspective, Balasubramanian, who along with Moopanar had met Sonia Gandhi some days back, says: "The TMC was formed when former Prime Minister Narasimha Rao worked out an unpopular alliance with Jayalalitha's AIADMK on the eve of the 1996 state and parliamentary elections. The TMC was born to fight Jayalalitha's corruption and high-handedness; now, how can we go back to her?" In Balasubramanian's scheme of things, there can only be an alliance with the Congress and the Left parties. Agrees Chidambaram. "The TMC will form a new front sans the DMK and the AIADMK," says the man about whom there are rumours that he may join the Sharad Pawar group in the Congress.

In such a situation, what happens to the TMC? Political pundits predict that the TMC may be heading for a split, with an exodus of middle and lower level leaders and workers back to the Congress. It began last week when N. Dennis, former TMC MP from Nagercoil, joined the Congress along with his supporters. Dennis' explanation probably sums up the mood in the camp: "I have nothing against Moopanar or anybody else in the TMC," he said. "But the ground realities have forced me to come back to the Congress. Today, the issue is that only Sonaiji and the Congress can provide a stable government."

Southern Equations



Moopanar is trying to impress upon the Congress leadership that it would be suicidal for the party to have an alliance with Jayalalitha

But it goes beyond that. Dennis, who has been winning for the last 15 years from Nagercovil mainly because of the minority Christian Nadar votes, won by less than a thousand votes against a BJP candidate in 1998. Now, as a Congress candidate and with AIADMK and possibly Left support, he thinks he can win by a margin of over a lakh in the coming polls.

Maybe he's right. But although Sonia Gandhi and TNCC president Tindivanam Ramamurthy want the TMC to merge with the Congress, Moopanar and some of his other colleagues oppose such a merger. Speaking to reporters at Satyamurthy Bhavan, the TMC HQ in Madras, Moopanar was somewhat dismissive of talks of alliances so early in the day. "All this talk of poll alliances is premature as the polls are nearly four months away," he said. "We have enough time to firm up our options."

Jayalalitha, however, is taking no chances. Recently, she told Congress mediators that if the Left parties are also accommodated into a grand alliance against Karunanidhi's DMK-BJP axis, she would have no problems sharing the dais with the TMC. Unfortunately for Moopanar, even if he himself isn't entirely averse to joining this coalition, it would irk his star campaigner Rajnikant whose latest film *Padayappa* has snide remarks against Jayalalitha. The film, running to full houses all over the state for the past one month, apparently pleased chief minister Karunanidhi. Then, Moopanar's plan to float a third front also has no takers.

Meanwhile the ruling DMK has formed an alliance consisting of the BJP, and its smaller allies like the PMK, the MDMK and the TRC. Defending his new friendship with the BJP, the chief minister said that the BJP, after heading a coalition at the Centre, had tempered its communal disposition. Says Dalit Ezhilmalai, the Union minister of state for health and the PMK general secretary: "The DMK-led grand alliance which has now emerged in Tamil Nadu is a winning combination. We all accept the able leadership of Vajpayee."

The BJP has promised the DMK-led alliance a share of power if they form the next government.

But whatever alliances are formed and whoever comes to power, one thing is certain. In Tamil Nadu, the outcome is going to be decided by the sta-



Chidambaram: "The TMC will form a new front sans the DMK and the AIADMK"

te's 20-per-cent minority population.

So, to woo the minorities, Karunanidhi, who has a strong Muslim vote-bank, has withdrawn the dreaded Prevention of Terrorist Activities (POTA) Bill. The Muslims had earlier alleged that the Bill, introduced after the Coimbatore blasts, was Karunanidhi's way of pleasing the BJP government. Karunanidhi's other sops to Muslims include added compensation to more than 363 families who lost their property during the riots which followed the blasts.

Not to be outdone, Jayalalitha is also **Dalit Ezhilmalai: "The DMK-led grand alliance which has now emerged in Tamil Nadu is a winning combination. We all accept the able leadership of Vajpayee"**



trying hard to woo back this once-strong minority vote-bank of the AIADMK. To give the impression that the AIADMK is secular, Jayalalitha held preliminary talks with Sharad Pawar. Jayalalitha described her *tete-a-tetes* as "pleasant, cordial and fruitful" and also added that the alliance will be firmed up by the end of the month. The only spoke in the wheel could be her insisting on a coalition government with plum posts for AIADMK MPs.

Pawar's Madras visit was bad news to Moopanar, though the recent Supreme Court ruling dismissing Jayalalitha's petition against the appointment of special judges by the TN Government to try corruption cases against her and also the quashing of a central notification transferring the cases from them was a big boost. He is now trying to impress upon the Congress leadership that it would be 'suicidal' for the party to have an alliance with Jayalalitha who's fighting 46 corruption cases.

The latest outburst from Sharad Pawar and his threat to Sonia Gandhi's leadership also comes as a major blow to Jayalalitha who has an excellent rapport with him. But it's not only Jayalalitha who'll suffer. With more pressing matters taking up Sonia's time, any decision on a new alliance in Tamil Nadu is certain to be shelved for the time being at least. Which includes Moopanar and his TMC as well. •

Sreedhar Pillai/Madras

The homemaker

Home secretary Kamal Pande has what it takes for the job

It was the unkindest cut of all. In the recent bureaucratic reshuffle, Kamal Pande, a 1965 batch UP cadre officer was made the Union home secretary. Almost immediately the rumours started: Pande had been shifted to this sensitive post because of his relationship with the BJP stalwart, Murli Manohar Joshi.

After all, said the critics, Pande is a Pahari from the Kumaon hills and so is Dr Joshi. Therefore, it is inevitable that the two are related. And that is why Pande got the job, concluded the rumour-mongers triumphantly. In fact, some went a bit further and claimed that Pande's saffron affiliations were implicit in his name, Kamal.

Of course, no one bothered to check if Pande was indeed related to Joshi (and more to the point, would L.K. Advani take on a protege of his *bete noire* in his ministry)? Worse still, no one bothered to look at Pande's impeccable track record: he had topped the 1965 batch. That he has also done an M.Sc. in physics from Allahabad University as well as a Masters in public administration from Harvard.

And importantly that he has the reputation of being an honest, clean and a no-nonsense type of an officer. The only blemish so far is that he is also — to quote a fellow IAS officer from UP — known to be 'slightly snooty'. But then, that could apply to most civil service officers, beginning with the flamboyant but highly efficient N.K. Singh.

Unfortunately for Pande, the controversy had nothing to do with his capabilities for the job, but everything with the manner of his transfer. Not

many made that fine distinction though.

The former home secretary came to know of his transfer in the most banal of ways. According to his friends, B.P. Singh was chairing a meeting relating to the ensuring Lok Sabha polls in his office at North Block when he got a call from the Prime Minister's Office informing him about his transfer from the home ministry. He was told that the agriculture secretary, Kamal Pande, would be replacing him.

The Opposition then went into overdrive. Three Congress leaders met the President of India and pointed out that since this was a caretaker government, it could not take decisions such as the transfer of bureaucrats in sensitive posts. It was later suggested to the press that in view of the impending elections, the BJP needed someone pliant.

However, there is nothing in Pande's record to show that he is either pliant or 'manageable'. Or that he is a BJP stooge. For Pande has been district magistrate in Uttar Pradesh when a Congress government was in power at the state. (He has worked with both

Veer Bahadur Singh and Narain Dutt Tiwari when they were chief ministers).

And, before anyone can put a Congress tag on him, his colleagues point out that he did little to accommodate local Congress politicians even at that time. In fact his instructions to his juniors were: ignore the politicians and go ahead with your work.

These commendations are in contrast with the unsavoury rumours circulating around town. For instance, there is the story told by senior Congressmen that when Arunachal Pradesh Governor Mata Prasad was asked to resign, the home secretary called him up and suggested that he cite health grounds in his resignation letter. But most ignore this for what it is: a slander campaign to discredit the BJP. Unfortunately, Pande is caught in the middle of a war that has got nothing to do with him.

Clearly there is nothing in his track record to show that he plays any political games — whatsoever.

After serving as secretary urban development and secretary forest and environment at the state level, Pande came to the Centre as a joint secretary in the finance ministry in the late Eighties. What marked his tenure in these posts was his zeal for decentralisation of work.

And the fact that he gave no priority whatsoever to the whims and fancies of his political masters. From all accounts, he has no political affiliation. And knows when to say no. Which should come as a surprise to both the government and the Opposition that is busy lambasting him. •

From all accounts, Pande has no political affiliation. And knows when to say no. Which should come as a surprise to both the government and the Opposition that is busy lambasting him



V. RAMOS/PA



Frequent Flier Programme Tie-ups With British Airways, KLM-Northwest Airlines.

(Because every business trip should add up to a holiday destination.)

OMINOUS

Like the NATO missiles which hit the Chinese embassy in Belgrade this month, this was a case of Pakistan aiming its weapons at the wrong target in Nepal. It is still early to say what the ripple effect of the mistaken Belgrade bombing will be, but in the case of Pakistan's misadventure in Nepal, the unintended beneficiary has been India.

For the first time since Nepal switched from absolute monarchy and the panchayat system of government to multi-party democracy, India, the much-reviled Big Brother of the subcontinent was not an issue in this month's elections in the kingdom.

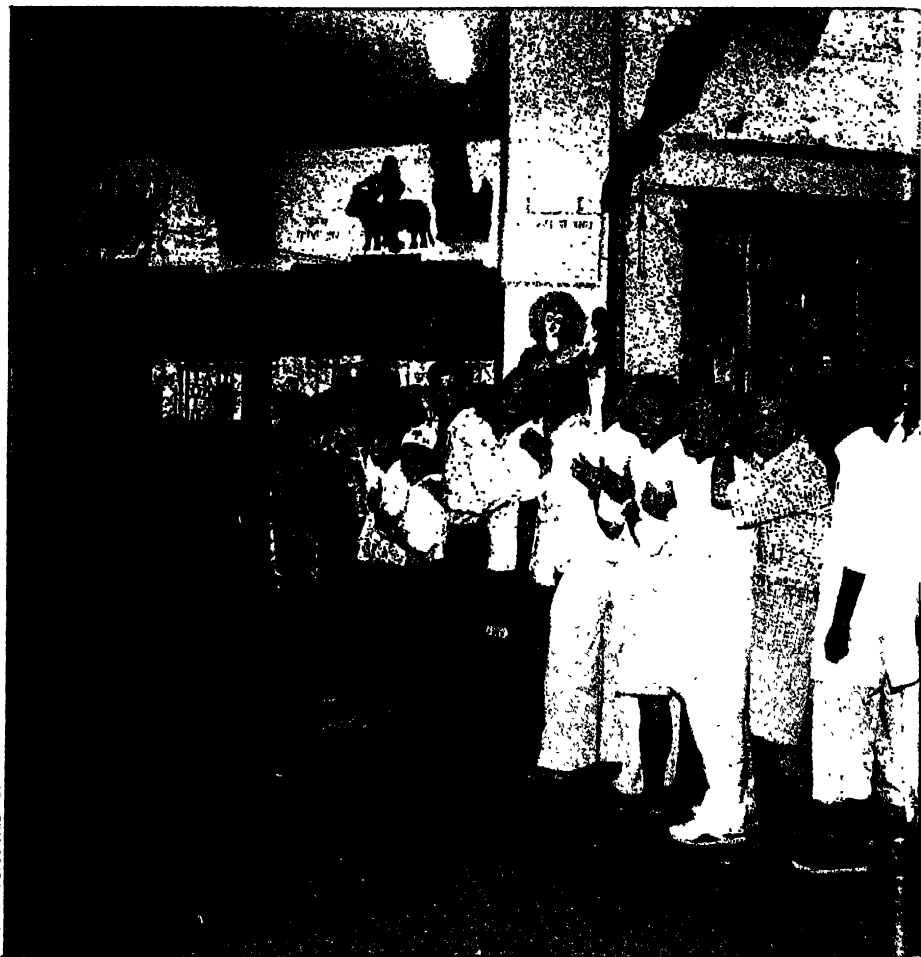
It was towards the end of last year as Nepal was inexorably drifting towards yet another premature election that the police in Kathmandu seized an incredible 19 kg of the deadly RDX explosive from a hotel in the Nepalese capital. The consignment was found in the possession of one Lakhbir Singh, but when he was picked up for interrogation by the Kathmandu police, no one realised that the incident would open a Pandora's box and have ramifications which may have a bearing on the recent elections in Nepal.

Revelations by Lakhbir Singh, a member of the shadowy Khalistan Zindabad Force (KZF), led to the swift arrest of four Pakistanis and seven other members of the KZF in Bangkok. But the trail also led to the Pakistani embassy in Kathmandu.

It is Kathmandu's worst-kept secret today that the RDX seized by the police was brought into the kingdom on a Pakistan International Airlines flight. Even more shocking, it was brought in as a diplomatic consignment to avoid detection at the point of entry.

No one here is talking about the incident officially, but any official confirmation would be redundant since almost everyone who is someone in Kathmandu knows even the minutest detail about the RDX haul. Lakhbir Singh and his accomplices in Bangkok — both Khalistani terrorists and Pakistanis — sang like birds.

As a result, three officials of the Pakistani embassy, counsellor Ejaz Husain Minhas, first secretary Arshad Cheema and a non-diplomat employee, Asam Saboor, are in the dock of Nepali public opinion for their complicity in bringing in the RDX and handing it over to the KZF man here to be eventually sent across the border into India.



Nepalis queuing up to vote: India is no longer an issue

The tip-off about the RDX originally came from the Interpol. The Pakistanis have been doubly embarrassed that the Interpol told the police here that Pakistan's diplomatic mission was the conduit for the flow of explosives into the kingdom.

It is a truism that countries ignore security threats in their neighbourhoods and elsewhere until they are directly threatened by dangerous individuals and subversive organisations. Nepal has been very sensitive in recent years to Indian concerns about Pakistani subversive activity from the kingdom's soil and has cooperated with New Delhi in checking the menace.

But all through these years, it was essentially an arrangement between the

governments in Kathmandu and New Delhi, something for cops and sleuths to deal with. It was largely out of the public domain.

The RDX seizure changed all that. It was no longer a case of Nepal being used merely as a point of transit for explosives and other subversive material to India.

Investigations by the Kathmandu police came up with two shocking revelations. Firstly, the RDX found here was meant primarily for use during the Republic Day celebrations in New Delhi this year. Secondly, another target for those involved in the operation was the World Buddhist Summit at Lumbini last December.

Now, the Lumbini summit was

S SIGNS

Nepal becomes the centre of an international anti-India game during the elections



A voter exercising his franchise: democracy takes roots

inaugurated by Nepal's Crown Prince Deependra while King Birendra was the chief guest at this year's Republic Day celebrations in New Delhi. The public realisation that either King Birendra or Crown Prince Deependra — or both — could have been hurt or killed as a result of the Pakistan-inspired subversion against India, Hinduism or Buddhism, completely changed the way the Nepalis were looking at Islamabad.

Pakistan was no longer the friendly South Asian neighbour. For a small minority of Nepalis, Islamabad was even a potential ally in need against the overwhelming presence of India. But no more. Islamabad had suddenly become the villain and there was unexpected sympathy for India.

Nepal has been very sensitive in recent years to Indian concerns about Pakistani subversive activity from its soil and has cooperated with New Delhi in checking the menace

The strong anti-Pakistan sentiment which is now sweeping Nepal may have died down all the same, had it not been for some India-baiting by a leading Opposition party, the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist) soon thereafter.

The CPN(ML), the breakaway communist party led by the mercurial former Prime Minister Bamdev Gautam, had an obvious eye on the anti-India vote-bank when it launched a vicious attack during the election campaign on finance minister Bharat Mohan Adhikari, also a fellow Marxist belonging to the parent Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninist).

The provocation for Gautam's attack on Adhikari was the latter's decision to

put Nepal's interests above those of China, an action which the CPN(ML) — like communists in many countries — finds hard to digest. Adhikari upheld Nepal's interests when he revised the valuation list for items imported from China into Nepal.

The valuation list is the basis on which duty is levied on imports: it is the

year, he had made a big issue of the presence of Indian troops in the small border strip known as Kalapani and had successfully cashed in on anti-India sentiments at a time when the nascent CPN(ML) was desperately seeking credibility.

Gautam's attempt to translate anti-Indian feelings into votes, however, appears to have hit a roadblock. In hitt-

all trade structure with India and the rest of the world.

To make matters worse for China and Gautam's party, it became evident to all Nepalis in the national debate which is now in full steam, that while Nepal gives a 20 per cent duty concession to Chinese goods, Beijing extends no such concession to products from Nepal. This is in marked contrast to the duty-free import of all Nepalese goods which India has allowed.

If the RDX seizure had created grave misgivings in the Nepali mind about national security, the China list episode fuelled feelings of nationalism and national pride, both of which are often strong sentiments in small countries.

The election campaign has produced an overwhelming feeling among the Nepalis that China wants to control and direct the course of Nepal's economy. It is a recurring theme in the Nepali media that having adopted a mixed economy, China is wary of Nepal becoming a laissez-faire state.

Election campaigns often defy logic. In the case of Nepal, the feeling has somehow sunk into the Nepali mind that tourism is the road to greater Western influence, and therefore, the Chinese are trying to limit Western influence by preventing investment in tourism.

Nepal's severe poverty has made the people of this kingdom look up to Western donor organisations and their projects for support and sustenance. Most Nepalis are convinced that China is trying to drive out these donors from Nepal by ensuring a communist victory: the Marxists here are known to be extremely suspicious of Western donor agencies.

In addition, NC and other non-communist parties have argued that not a single foreign investment project was implemented during Marxist rule here. Some of the odium for this sticks to Chinese patronage of Nepali Marxists.

Last year, after the Pokhran II nuclear tests, India feared that a coalition of China, Pakistan and the US, with minor partners like North Korea and the UK, would seriously undercut Indian interests in the kingdom and make India very vulnerable in dealing with Nepal. Not only is this coalition behind India, the recent elections may even throw up a dispensation which understands and appreciates the way India does business with Nepal. •

K.P. Nayar/Kathmandu



The public realisation that either King Birendra (foreground, left) could have been hurt or killed as a result of the Pakistan-inspired subversion changed the Nepalis' attitude towards Islamabad

first time in 20 years that the list has been revised for Chinese goods.

When Gautam's party took the issue to the streets and on the campaign trail, the CPN(UML) and its larger partner in the ruling alliance, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala's Nepali Congress (NC) hit back.

The big mistake which Gautam made was to have alleged that the valuation list had been revised at India's instance to favour Indian products and to cut the market share of Chinese goods. Last

ing back at the CPN(ML), both the NC and the CPN(UML) pointed out that similar valuation lists for Indian imports have been periodically and regularly revised. There are lists on imports from other countries as well, which have also been revised periodically.

All this exposed the CPN(ML) as a party which was against Nepal getting more revenue from trade with China, which was helping China to dump its cheap goods on Nepal and which was conspiring to derail the kingdom's over-

Security check

A minimum nuclear preparedness for India is the need of the hour



On the first anniversary of the Shakti series of nuclear tests — which have brought home to the world that India is a power in possession of nuclear weapons, never mind the NPT's dubious definition of a nuclear weapon state — A.B. Vajpayee combined a spot of electioneering with some much-needed plainspeaking to the outside world.

He spoke out, rather belatedly, against the US-led NATO's relentless and remorseless air strikes on Yugoslavia. Deploring the Western alliance's "high-handed and autocratic" behaviour, he posed the pertinent question: "Who can be safe in this atmosphere?"

Surprisingly, he did not say anything about NATO's ominous new doctrine which makes this military alliance America's main instrument for establishing its global hegemony, an objective which once-proud European nations have accepted meekly. But the rest of the world cannot be a silent spectator. Especially because the latest NATO doctrine gives primacy to nuclear weapons, rejects No First Use and assigns to the US the right to station its nuclear weapons in European countries which now include Poland, Hungary and the Czech republic.

However, this chilling reality must have been at the back of the Prime Minister's mind when he told his countrymen: "In this kind of security environment, we can ill-afford to be weak or complacent in our defence preparedness." He went on to add that though the "cycle of security" had been "completed" with the Pokhran-II blasts and the Agni-II launch, complacency was out of place. "If necessary, we will undertake more missile tests.

All this makes perfect sense. Cruise and ballistic missiles, surface-to-surface, sea-launched or dropped-from-air, are standard weapons of use, as has been underscored in Iraq earlier and Yugoslavia now.

The surprise is not that the need for a minimum nuclear deterrent for this country, consisting unavoidably of both nuclear warheads and missiles, is being increasingly recognised but that so many continue to be opposed to the Indian nuclear deterrent.

There are some who are wholly and blindly opposed to any kind of nuclear activity. But a much larger proportion of Indians shouting against this country's nuclear weapons consists of those who are delighted to accept nuclear weapons of others but consider them dangerous only when India possesses them. An even larger number are extremely happy to swallow the motivated and misleading propaganda masterminded by the very powers who insist on maintaining (and using) their nuclear weapons in perpetuity. At best, these powers pay lip sympathy to the objective of total elimination of nuclear weapons but add, in the same breath, that it would be "a very long haul". None of them is prepared to discuss any reasonable time-frame.

For the apparently unending confusion and misinformation



A burnt-down garage in Kosovo capital Pristina after being hit by a NATO missile

NATO has become America's main instrument for establishing its global hegemony. This chilling reality must have been at the back of Vajpayee's mind when he said: "In this kind of security environment, we can ill-afford to be weak or complacent in our defence preparedness"

over our nuclear imperatives, the BJP-led government must accept its share of blame. From the word go on 11 May, 1998, it said goodbye to the urgently required consensus-building on nuclear policy. Instead, it embarked on a course which was aimed at arrogating to the Hindutva camp the entire credit for making India nuclear in its first two months in power, forgetting the good work done by the preceding, mostly Congress or Congress-supported, governments over half-a-century.

Meanwhile, the incorrigibly arrogant Americans and their obedient European camp followers (with only Germany dissenting mildly) are finding it hard to come to terms with their stupidity of bombing the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade. Till the moment of writing, they have been offering apologies for a "tragic mistake", blamed laughably on an "outdated map", but have been combining this with the declaration that the air strikes would continue. China's righteous rage persists, and has been accompanied by a suspension of engagement with America on a whole range of issues. It is time to use the disdainfully sidelined UN to call to account the warmongers who are raining death and destruction on both Serbs and Kosovars. •

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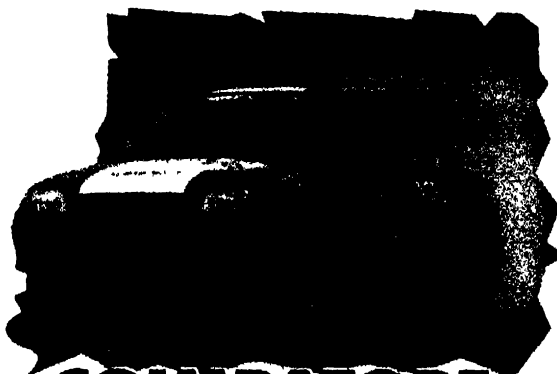


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RUPINDER SHARMA



How Bangalore's street children are learning to cope with sexual abuse, drugs, hunger and stress

END OF INNOCENCE

** It was well after sunset. The nuns at a rehabilitation centre for street children in Bangalore were growing restless. Madhu, a ten-year-old inmate — he ran away from home three years ago — had not returned from school. A frantic search found her in the school toilet, sexually abusing a boy. The boy had been stripped naked and looked badly shaken at the time he was rescued.*

Madhu had a history of being sexually abused since the age of five.

** Raghu — barely ten — was with his usual gang of friends. They were all 'huffing' — sniffing Erazex (typewriter ink correction fluid) from a piece of cloth. That's what gave them an instant 'high'. It had been a long day for all his rag-picker friends. To beat the boredom, Raghu wanted to try out something 'different'. He emptied the bottle of Erazex, more commonly known as 'solution', in a plastic bag and put his head inside to inhale the vapours without any breaks. He soon died of asphyxiation.*

Raghu had run away from his alcoholic father and stepmother after being brutally beaten up one evening.

** It was late in the evening. There was just one female counsellor working at the home for street children. Fourteen-year-old Shiva walked in and held a sharp knife at the counsellor's throat. "Remove your nose-pin. I don't like it," he threatened. Shiva was completely drunk. However, after much*

coaxing and cajoling he put the knife away. An 'alcoholic' and an obviously 'aggressive' person, Shiva was often driven to such extreme behaviour.

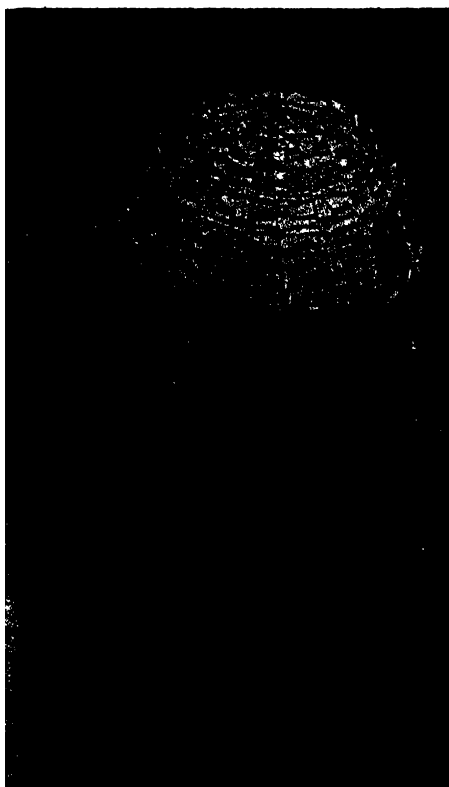
Shiva's girlfriend (who also wore a nose-pin) was allegedly raped in front of him. A rival gang got away after committing the heinous crime, as Shiva watched helplessly, tied to a tree.

Last month, a detailed survey conducted by the Bangalore Oniyavara Seva Coota (BOSCO), a Bangalore-based non-governmental organisation working for street children, revealed that about 60 children who leave home land up in Bangalore everyday. The study was confined to the rail-

way station and bus stand. "Surveys done by BOSCO on fresh arrival of street children at two points [the city's railway station and bus stand] present the average figure of 50-60 children per day," explains Father Varghese Palliputram, executive director at BOSCO. "By that estimate we will have about 1,00,000 children on the streets of Bangalore by the year 2000," he adds.

Once on the streets, hunger, disease and exploitation becomes a way of life.

Brinda Subramaniam is a counsellor at the Makkala Sahaya Vani, a police helpline for children. "I get about 85 calls a day and most children start by fooling around," she says. "After a lot of probing they come out with the real issues but in the case of street children or children from the slums, it is extremely difficult to get to the crux of the problem since most of them are averse to discussing pain or trauma which they may have been facing."



RUPINDER SHARMA

some kind of emotional bonding or attachments," says Dr Shekhar Shekshadri, a child psychiatrist at the National Institute of Mental Health and Sciences (NIMHANS). "When you grow up without having anybody to turn to, believing and living in a world where no rules apply, then most often you end up harming yourself," he adds.

Social workers say that the best way to rehabilitate street children is to reunite them with their families. Though this is not an easy task since counselling is required on both sides, children and parents as well. "The problem is compounded when these children are on the streets for too long," says Brinda Subramaniam. "They get into bad habits and are often exploited at workplaces," she adds.



BRINDA SUBRAMANIAM

"Children who are on the streets for too long, get into bad habits and are often exploited at workplaces"



FATHER VARGHESE

"We will have 1,00,000 children on the streets of Bangalore by the year 2000"

With little emotional back-up available, most children coming from the lower rungs of society grow up facing their problems all by themselves. Research has also proved that children who have families and almost 70 per cent of these children do, are likely to grow up with fewer problems. "A lot of it depends on whether these children have

There are many on the lookout for such easy targets. Hotel-brokers and pimps catch these children on arrival — to be employed as cheap labour. However, NGOs and the local police are working on this problem. "We have a booth at the station and bus stand," says father Varghese. "We try to take them into homes and shelters for counselling

before they are introduced to the life on the streets," he adds.

Bangalore police has also woken up to the sudden spurt in the number of street children arriving in the city. Besides a shelter for street children, the police have a toll-free telephone helpline. Rather than taking such children into custody and putting them behind bars, the police have now adopted a much softer approach. In fact, at Makkala Ashraya, a police-run home, most boys seem so comfortable that they do not wish to return home. For instance, Govinda has eight brothers and two sisters. But he does not miss them any more. "Why should I go back home? I have so many boys to play with and Uncle [the policeman in-charge] is here to take care of us," he says.

However, the aim of most NGOs, as of the police, is to reunite the children with their families. "We counsel them to return to their families," says Father Varghese. "In cases where the families are not ready to take the child back, or vice versa, we have vocational training institutes and a network with other NGOs that have permanent shelters for homeless children."

Early intervention seems to be the most effective method to tackle the growing number of children on the streets. Besides, there is the problem of drug abuse. Six deaths caused by drugs have been reported in late 1996.

The problem is compounded by the fact that street children are a highly mobile population. Therapy or counselling becomes extremely difficult since tracking down most of them is a major problem. Behavioural aberrations such as active sex life at an early age, drug addiction and aggressive outbursts are actually a fallout of living on the streets, fighting abuse, hunger and stress.

Meena Jain, a freelance social worker for street and slum children with cancer, says, "Our group helps these children fulfill their last wishes."

Laxmi was 12 when she was diagnosed with cancer of the bone. She had very little time and almost no chances of survival. Her last wish was to die in a party dress. Raghupati was nine and he wanted to see an elephant before he died. Raju just wanted a banana and a glass of juice.

Which shows even when these homeless children aren't actually dying, their dreams die young. •

Anuja Joshi/Bangalore

At a glance

Jaya Jaitly and her team map out a definitive guide to Indian art and crafts

When you walk into Laila Tyabji's Dastkar or Tribes, the high-profile store conceptualised by Maneka Gandhi or Dilli Haat, or even the annual Suraj Kund Mela, you get to see one side of India — it's the one which is trying to jostle for space with the MTV-Nike-Ray-Ban-smitten India. It's that world of splendidly handcrafted art objects and weaves painstakingly designed by craftsmen who do not work from the comfort of air-conditioned workshops, aided and abetted by media hype and marketing blitz.

One gets to actually see these unknown, nameless artists only when visiting a *mela* (fair) or exhibition, which often come as part of a sales package. One remembers a highly-advertised exhibition of *chikan* work from UP in a store in Delhi's posh Aurobindo Market. In front of the rows of exquisite *chikan* saris and kurtas sat a couple of girls and old men, embroidering. 'They are the craftsmen' we were told. While one wondered what share of the profit they got and if they were compensated enough in the first place, a concept was born. That getting artisans to do a demo at a sales venue helped to establish credibility.

Until recently there were two options for those wishing to know about Indian craft and culture: either travel to the area (pocket and energy level permitting) or leaf through the several coffee-table glossies in circulation. That most of these books are either unwieldy or superficial in their approach is another matter.

The absence of a credible, well-researched, definitive guide to Indian art and crafts led to the idea of a culture map. Jaya Jaitly, the brain behind the popular Dilli Haat and a crusader for the rights of Indian handicraftsmen, was roaming the streets of Bangkok when she came across maps which graphically described the city. They also contained

useful information about authentic Thai food joints and places where one could buy Thai handicrafts.

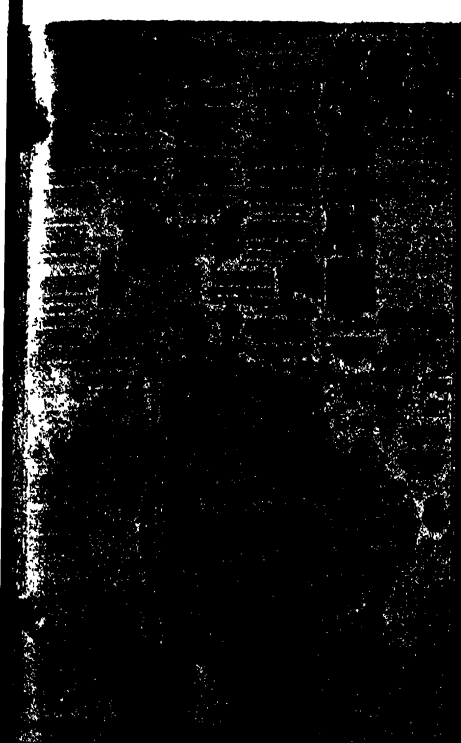
The idea was first translated into a crafts map of India, showing the craft each state of the country specialised in. The effect was interesting but offered only a cursory look at the craftwork of India. "I thought it would be a better idea to have a state-wise map where we could show in detail what each state specialised in and in which town or village one could find the crafts and craftsmen specialising in the art," says Jaitly. The result

is crafts maps of Rajasthan, Orissa, Karnataka and so on.

Each map is a riot of colour and makes ample use of motifs borrowed from the art forms of the area it is depicting. For instance, the Orissa craft map is painted in the traditional *patachitra* style, typical of Orissa. (A *pat* is used as an offering in temples and is painted with natural colours, shell powders and organic lac on paper or cloth, stiffened with tamarind seed and chalk powder.)

The areas where an art form character-





ristic of the state exists, are marked out. As are the pockets where the craftsmen live. There are detailed descriptions of the different art forms the state specialises in and every motif and figure duly explained.

Though the maps have been conceived and co-ordinated by Jaitly, several people have worked hard to collect the information. "All information provided in the map is first hand. The people who wrote the text travelled to the areas about which they have written — met the craftsmen, talked to them about their problems, tried to understand their work and then showed them in the map."

The beauty of the maps lie in their compactness. Unlike the coffee table books, they are easy to read and can also double as wall decorations. Apart from showing the areas, the maps give information about the craft markets in the districts and list the state government handicraft shops.

But the best part of the crafts map project is the pricing. Says Jaitly, "We kept the buyers' budget in mind. Coffee-table books are frightfully expensive, which the ordinary tourists may not be able to afford. These maps come cheap, making them accessible to all." At the moment, they are being distributed for free but when they go into reprints, there will be a nominal price tag.

The financial support came from the department of handicraft, ministry of textiles. They are doing it for a good cause. "The maps are interesting and well-produced and they will do good for



JAYA JAITLEY

"Our team went to the areas, met the craftsmen, tried to understand their work and showed them on the map"



LAILA TYABJI

"Unlike books on handicrafts which tend to be sacrosanct and boring, these maps are lively and entertaining"

the craftsmen. The public will come to know about them and this will help the artists reach out to wider markets," says R.K. Mathur, development commissioner, handicrafts.

"The initial response has been very good. Everybody wants it [the maps] and I am happily distributing it," says a delighted Jaitly.

A delight which Laila Tyabji of Dastkar shares. "The delightful thing about the maps which I have put up in my office is that they are done in the craft idiom. Anything which makes people aware of Indian crafts is good. For the craftsmen it is a wonderful tool by which they can acquaint themselves with the market. The best part is that unlike books on handicrafts which tend to be sacrosanct and boring, these maps are lively and entertaining."

The maps could actually go a long way in bringing the hitherto-neglected tribe of craftsmen in the limelight. They are designed to kindle interest in both the art and the artists. This interest can be cultivated to create a market for the goods. And what could be better than craftsmen having direct access to the market and the buyers?

If even a single buyer or a foreign tourist walks up to the craftsperson who he has come to know of through the map and places an order, the crafts map would have fulfilled its aim. And for Jaitly and her team it will be another broad step towards the realisation of their dream, that of a country which has successfully wedded two cultures — the Western and the indigenous. •

Pallavi Ghosh/New Delhi

UPDATE ON RIYA: SHE TAKES AFTER HER GRANDMA

Yes, she is young and svelte, can even strike alluring poses, but Riya, Bengali actress Moon Moon Sen's daughter, hasn't obviously inherited her mother's PR skills. The contrast was in sharp focus recently at the launch of a fashion boutique in Delhi where both were present. While Moon Moon cosied up to the assembled journoes and organisers, Riya silently trailed her mom. The only time she opened her mouth was when she was asked how she felt about her impending career in films. "I



Suchitra Sen

draw inspiration from my grandmother and mother," replied Riya. "Mother?" pressed the incredulous scribes. "Of course. There are certain roles she has done which I don't think anyone else could have. She started a trend," countered the loyal daughter and then went off looking for her mom.



Moon Moon Sen

What trend, we daren't surmise, though we did learn something: when it comes to tackling the press, she is more like her grandma, actress Suchitra Sen, who also clammed up after she stopped acting in films.

Indeed, her mystique still endures.

Riya



CRICKET ON THE NET; NOW, IT'S GOA THAT BECKONS



ASHOK HALLU

As the carnival gets hotter, getting inside cricket assumes new dimensions. Thanks to **Ramana Gogula**, former MD of Sybase, net-surfers now get a chance to score virtual cricketing points and clinch an all-expenses-paid weekend for two in Goa. The details:

How it happened

Gogula and his partner Anand Adkoli launched Liqwid Krystal, a company which focuses on 'smart' technologies. Then, in collaboration with Coke and Bacardi, they came up with the Internet-based game Dream Cricket.

How to play

Those who register on the company's website, www.liqwidkrystal.com, create their own Dream team with their favourite players from the 12 participating sides and score points as the players score in the World Cup. The entry with the highest tally wins.

A harmonic leg-up

Notching up virtual points isn't the only seduction. Gogula has also come up with a music video, **Don't Give Up**, to cheer the Indian team. The storyboard revolves around a group of kids between 7 and 11 who dream that they are part of the mega event.

The response we should expect

Considering that for the past one month both kids and adults have lived on Britannia biscuits, it shouldn't be bad. Also, the new video is worth checking out.

And yes! we all want a free trip to Goa.

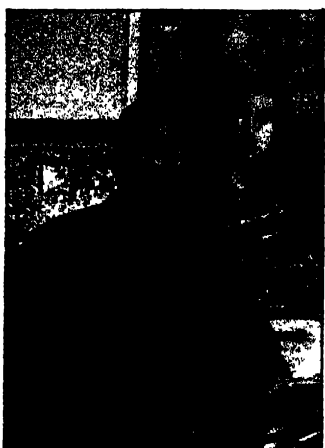
HE IS DIFFERENT

Ordinary, mediocre folk like you and I would never understand it: that talented people not only begin early, they think differently too.

So, when Manav Gupta was presented with a box of crayons at the age of one, most thought the gift to be a trifle too early. The one-year old didn't think so: the

colour sticks became tools for his future career.

Now, after successful solo exhibitions at the Birla Academy of Art and Taj Bengal, Gupta is set to launch a first-of-its-kind book, *India Awaiting — Aide-Memoire To A Dream*, which sketches stages in a person's life and also has a page attached wherein readers can maintain a diary of their own lives. "I thought others may have similar thoughts and feelings and this book would be an excellent opportunity to give vent to their dreams and aspirations," he says. "Dreams are visions about the future and everyone has a right to plan his future."



NIPUN SHANU



APU SISTA

(From left) Mani, Heri and Ramamani

HARMONIOUS TRIO

Last year, Bangalore, the city of cyber cafes and pubs, literally jazzed up with three city-bred musicians — guitarist Amit Heri, Carnatic vocalist R.A. Ramamani and *mridangam* expert T.A.S. Mani — performing at the Berlin Jazz Festival. Heri, a product of the Berkeley College of Music, Boston, is also the first Indian guitarist to perform at the festival. The three, who are part of American jazz saxophonist Charlie Mariano's group Bangalore, now travel to Germany, Austria, France and Switzerland along with Mariano and Dave King (bass) where they have been invited to participate in 15 jazz festivals.

'WHAT I WRITE IS MY VIEW OF MY OWN WORLD'



At 32, Raj Kamal Jha, the shockheaded scribe-by-day and writer-by-night, has sold his debut novel *The Blue Bedspread* for close to a crore to assorted foreign publishers. We spoke to him.

Q: In your interview to Newsweek you said Calcutta is probably the only real life character in your book. How functional is it?

A: For one's first book one has to tap the well one knows best. It was only natural to have set my book in Calcutta.

Q: Your book speaks about love, loss and longing and deeply-felt personal experiences. Isn't there a surfeit already of Indo-Anglian writing based on similar themes?

A: That's because very few Indian writers in English are at work on their third or fourth book. When that happens, the writers will be growing with them.

Q: How's the experience like, given that so much of your writing is about darkness of human character?

A: But my novel is essentially about love and hope and how they're used to tackle that darkness.

Q: While writing, is it exhausting or therapeutic or rejuvenating?

A: A mixture of all three. You need to do it for God knows what reason. You hope that you can tell a story which makes sense to people you don't know.

Q: Does it bother you that your book in which the 12 million people of Calcutta are referred to more than once is written in a language most of its people don't understand?

A: I wish I were writing in Bengali or in Hindi. It's just that I'm not equipped with that kind of skill.

Q: And that your fictional world is dissociated from the lives of a large section of those 12 million people?

A: What I write is my view of my own world. I can never write about other people. What one can only hope as a writer is that somewhere there is an overlap.

Interviewed by Chitralekha Das

Ray watch

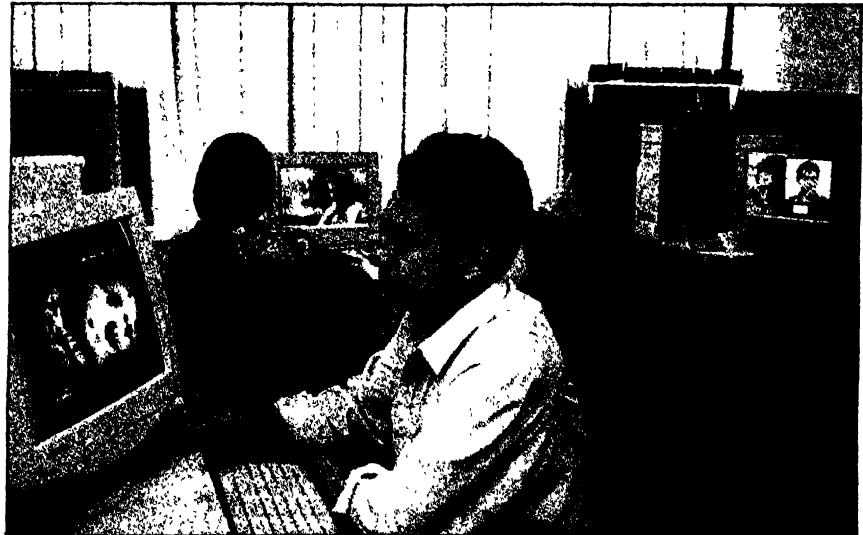
The first-ever CD-ROM on Satyajit Ray hits the stands

Finally, informatics has found Satyajit Ray. The first-ever CD-ROM on the film legend has hit the Indian market with General Outram in his *Satranj Ke Khilari*, Lord Richard Attenborough giving the voice-over in this path-breaking endeavour.

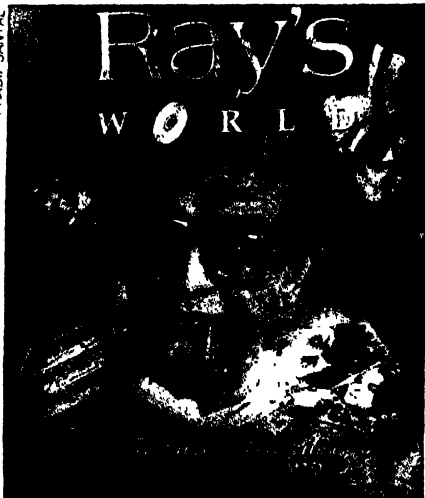
The CD-ROM venture is the brain-child of Suparno Chaudhuri of PricewaterhouseCoopers Ltd who first broached the idea to Sandip Ray last year. But the project got the head start when Kamal Bansal, CEO, RDB Entertainment (RDBE) agreed to finance it. Talking to

with filmography, synopses and 45 minutes of movie clips, anecdotes, storyboards, sketches, music scores and writings. Critical acclaim, comments and interpretations from film masters like Martin Scorsese, French actor-filmmaker Gerard Depardieu and Ray's own interviews will go into the package.

PRADIP SANYAL



The production team at the multimedia lab and the CD-ROM jacket: marketing the maestro



SUNDAY, Kamal Bansal said, "Ray's World, as the CD is titled, is our tribute to the genius of Ray. We've been associated with the Rays for a long time and last year, when PricewaterhouseCoopers Ltd approached me, I agreed to finance the project," added Bansal.

For the graphics part and other technical support, global accounting and consultancy giant PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) offered their expertise. While domestic marketing will be handled by RDBE itself, international names like Amazon.com have shown interest to lend logistics to take on the world market.

"My father R.D. Bansal was closely associated with the maestro in the earlier years and we have six Ray classics — *Mahanagar*, *Charulata*, *Kapurush* O *Mahapurush*, *Nayak* and *Jai Baba*

Felunath — to our credit," said Bansal. He was contemplating entering the world of multimedia despite its still limited scope. "I believe it has tremendous potential for the young," added Bansal.

Anything on Ray would naturally require an enormous endeavour to cover the entire gamut of Ray's genius. But Bansal was not intimidated. Around eight months ago, Bansal got down to piecing together the bits and pieces of material he would need. Videos, documentaries, books, still photographs — in short — everything that would go into the CD. Throughout he kept in touch with Sandip Ray. "I was grateful also to Shyam Benegal and Gautam Ghosh who helped us with a few things," said Bansal.

The CD-ROM, spread over six sections — Intimate portrait, Cinematic gaze, Other facets, Image gallery, Ray on Ray and Dossier — will take the viewer on an interactive journey into the maestro's life and works. It will contain a biographical sketch of Ray, an encapsulation of his artistic oeuvre, complete

A dossier of his films, reviews from across the world, the awards he received and a reference section on Satyajit Ray's music will wrap up the package. "We are also making a French version of the CD which will be ready by July," said a beaming Bansal.

"It has been a tough time at the Multimedia laboratory of PwC. At the same time, it was the most enjoyable moment," said Chaudhuri who heads the Multimedia and Web division of PricewaterhouseCoopers Ltd. A team of graphic designers, editors, music composers and programmers worked for four months to complete the project. The production was carried out on seven high end workstations at the Multimedia laboratory of PwC utilising graphics, image editing, audiovisual and programming softwares like Photoshop, Freehand, Premiere and Director," said Chaudhuri. "I am grateful to Pinaki Chatterjee who wrote the entire script for the CD-ROM," added Chaudhuri.

A virtual treat is on the platter for die-hard Ray fans. The first-ever comprehensive CD-ROM was launched in Calcutta on 11 May. At Rs 1600 apiece in India and \$ 50 in the international market should be affordable to all who care.

So just mouse-click your way into the world of Ray. •

Pankaj Adhikari/Calcutta



Sharad Pawar and Sonia Gandhi: heading for a point of no return?

The battle in the west

In more ways than one this has always meant the 'West' for India's burgeoning middle classes since the turn of the last century. The core of this region formed significant parts of the Bombay presidency during the colonial era and symbolised both the decay of the once powerful ruling sections — in this case the Marathas — and also the advent of the industrial age in India.

About 100 years ago, western India offered hope for everyone: the British administrators, social reformers, Hindu revivalists, armed revolutionaries and traditional political activists. If the British hoped to get a firm foothold in colonial India, then their adversaries were

Every party is hopeful in the electoral race in Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan

hopeful that the region would emerge as the epicentre of nationalist activity.

And indeed it did satisfy both: the colonial rulers succeeded in creating an industrial capital in this region's foremost city, Bombay, and the nationalists hit back by providing the impetus for the Swadeshi Movement that was the first real agitation to rock the British edifice.

As the region's three main states — Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan

accounting for 99 seats — prepare for the millennium's last elections, the principal mood in the main adversaries is also that of hope.

By the logic of the Bharatiya Janata Party leaders, the party cannot perform worse in the major part of the region. Similarly, the Congress leaders see reasons to smile even in the face of setbacks in parts of the region. Even though the lead time for this election is one of the longest and many new alignments are expected before D-Day, every important player has some chance of improving upon the 1998 performance, at least in some areas. How all that would add up to the national tally however, is a million-rupee question.

Maharashtra

Basic facts

The 1998 election

✱ The BJP's cavalcade was actually halted here. Though polling just 1.23 per cent votes less than the Congress, the BJP-Shiv Sena alliance won 10 seats as compared to the 37 of the Congress and its allies. This was down from the ironical performance of 1996 when the BJP alliance bagged 33 seats even while polling nearly four per cent less.

✱ Many heads of the BJP-SS combine rolled including that of Pramod Mahajan who then had to make his way to the Union Cabinet via the Rajya Sabha.

✱ The BJP-SS apple-cart was upset by a clever electoral alliance between the Congress, the Samajwadi Party and the Republican Party of India. The RPI won four seats polling 4.19 per cent votes. These votes, along with the 2.65 per cent polled by the Samajwadi Party, gave the Congress-led front a total of 50.28 per cent. The resultant lead of 8.07 per cent was the reason behind the humiliating defeat of the BJP-SS combine.

The 1999 election

✱ In private, the BJP leaders say that they are basing their hopes on the logic that their performance could not be worse than the last time.

The party also feels that the polls this time will not be fought on local issues and that the Sonia wave would have ebbed following the fading of the 'novelty' factor. Moreover, problems within the Congress would be to the party's advantage.

✱ According to private estimates, the BJP-SS combine has been able to stem the rot by changing the state chief minister. The alliance is also functioning more smoothly.

✱ The RPI is in an aggressive mood and demanding more than a dozen seats from the Congress. It has also sharpened its knives for Sharad Pawar, accusing him of following anti-Dalit policies.

In the event of a Pawar versus Sonia scenario in the Congress heading to a point of no return, the RPI is expected to side with Sonia as the party has drawn

parallels between her 'foreigner' status and the Dalits' 'untouchable' tag.

✱ The Samajwadi Party in Maharashtra has all but folded up and merged with the Congress. This however, is more a political gain than psephological, and elections are not fought on pocket calculators. But problems within the Congress will cause the new entrants to rethink and there will be many changes before the polls. That will have a direct bearing on the fortunes of the BJP-Sena combine.

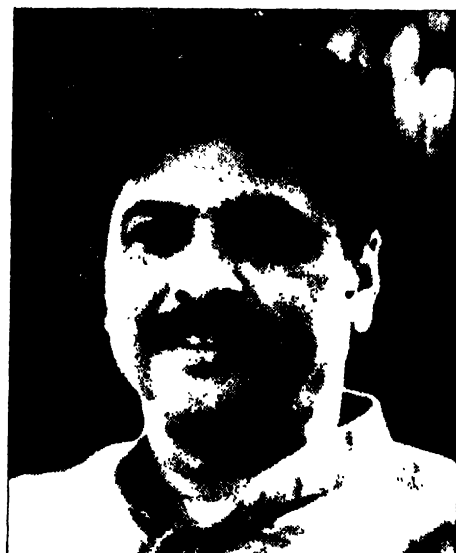
Konkan

Though not among the biggest of the state's regions, the fortunes in Konkan have a great bearing on the polls as major gains were made by the Shiv Sena in recent years. Till the advent of the Sena in the region in the late Eighties, opposition to the Congress was mainly from the Peasants and Workers Party and the Praja Socialist Party, whose members later joined the Janata combine.

Among the heads to roll after being struck by the Sena cavalcade was veteran Madhu Dandavate who represented Rajapur. Only A.R. Antulay managed to ward off the Sena challenge in Kolaba three times between 1989 and 1996. The 1998 elections, however, saw the setback of the former chief minister when he lost to the PWP candidate. With the PWP retaining its fierce anti-Sena position, the present ruling combination has an advantage on account of the split in Opposition votes.

Of particular political significance this time is the Rajapur seat that was

The developments within the Congress will have a direct bearing on the fortunes of the BJP-Sena combine in Maharashtra. The latter can only hope for a divided Congress house



Pramod Mahajan: can he get through this time?

retained by the Sena's Suresh Prabhu. Witnessing a three-cornered contest, the winner has benefited from the split in votes. In 1996 and 1998, Prabhu won despite polling less votes than the combined votes of the Congress and Janata Dal.

Similarly, the Congress candidate and Narasimha Rao's troubleshooter in the early Nineties, won in 1991 because of the Sena and JD splitting Opposition votes. This time, the fortunes of the Sena depend on the adversaries it faces. If the Opposition is united, the Sena stands to lose. If not, then Prabhu — or any other Sena nominee — should have an easy time.

Vidharbha

The region is a late entrant to modern Maharashtra as it was part of the Central Provinces & Berar during the British period. While it remained with the Congress since Independence, the BJP has made tremendous gains in the region in the last decade. The Sena has not made much headway and its ties with the BJP have been tense on account of the latter's support for a separate state of Vidharbha.

The most symbolic seat is Nagpur, if only for the fact that the headquarters of the RSS is situated here. But, its initial distaste for electoral politics had an impact as it was one of the few seats that the Congress managed to wrest from the Opposition (not the Jana Sangh but the Republican Party) during the tidal wave against the party in 1977. The BJP took



A.R. Antulay: managed to ward off the Sena challenge

long to develop an electoral base and it was only from 1984 that the party started polling votes in double digits.

The BJP won the seat in 1996 but its candidate—local media baron Banwarilal Purohit who defected from the Congress during the Ayodhya agitation—became an embarrassment for the party after locking horns with the leadership.

As a result, the BJP changed its candidate in 1998 and the Congress reacted by fielding former Union minister Vilas Muttemwar who wrested the seat from the BJP.

However, his victory was primarily because of the alliance with the RPI that has had a steady base of more than 20 per cent from the beginning. In the coming elections, the BJP will have to be careful regarding candidate selection

Mumbai

Though accounting for just six seats, the constituencies have great symbolic value if only for the fact that the city is the citadel of most parties. The metropolis has witnessed tremendous growth of the Shiv Sena. Even in the last elections, the BJP-Sena combine managed to win half the seats despite facing a rout in other regions. The BJP rode piggyback on the Sena in the metro and none of its leaders barring Ram Naik managed to retain his seat.

Particularly significant is the Mumbai (South central) seat that was once represented by fiery trade unionist Datta



Suresh Prabhu: benefited from the split in votes

Samant. In the last election, the Sena retained the seat by a narrow margin defeating the Samajwadi Party candidate supported by the Congress. However, the Sena retained the seat mainly because a significant portion of the anti-Sena votes was polled by a United Front-sponsored trade unionist.

The Sena's chances of wresting the seat again depend on the nature of the alliance against it. In case of a two-horse race, the situation would be to the Sena's disadvantage. Otherwise, it is likely to scrape through again.

Marathwada

Once a Congress bastion, the Shiv Sena has profited here in recent years by the split in the anti-Sena vote. Though Jana Sangh did creditably in many seats in the region during the first anti-Congress wave in 1967, it turned out to be a one-time development and did not cement the party's base in the region.

Among the significant seats is Aurangabad, that has a Muslim presence of 19 per cent. Moreshwar Save won the seat as an Independent supported by the Sena in 1989. After enthusiastic participation in the Ayodhya agitation, he joined the party to become its parliamentary leader. But, he soon queered the pitch for Bal Thackeray and quit the party.

In the last election, the Sena repeated its sitting MP who replaced Save in

1996. The Congress, however, changed its candidate after its profitable alliance with the RPI. The consolidation of anti-Sena votes led to the defeat of its candidate. In the coming election, the Sena's prospects would depend on the nature of alliance in the state.

Western Maharashtra

A peculiar name this, to the region. One can ask, "West of what?" But, this is the moneyed sugar belt. And a Congress bastion. More specifically, a pocket borough of Sharad Pawar. It has 12 seats, with senior Congress leaders retaining theirs for several terms. The Congress has a fair sprinkling of three-time, five-time and even seven-time winners. In the 1998 election, the alliance with the RPI further aided the Congress and the Sena could win only one seat, while the BJP failed to win a single one.

This time, the developments within the Congress will have a direct bearing on the fortunes of the BJP-Sena combine. The only hope for the latter to stage a good showing is to hope for a divided Congress house with the RPI to act as an additional spoiler. The main seats are Solapur, Kolhapur, Baramati, Pune, Satara and Sangli.

Northern Maharashtra

With eight seats, this is one of the two major tribal dominated areas. At one point, it had a fair presence of the communist parties. It came under the saffron sway in the Nineties. However, in 1998, the Sena and the BJP managed to win only one seat each, while the Congress won six.

The constituency of Dahanu is interesting in the context of the recent controversy in the tribal areas in adjoining Gujarat. With a tribal voter strength of 49.2 per cent, this was a Congress bastion till 1991. 1957 and 1977 were the only occasions when the Congress candidate lost to communist candidates, the CPI in 1957 and the CPI(M) in 1977.

But the BJP's success in tribal areas became evident in 1996 when it wrested the seat. However, it proved to be a flash in the pan when the BJP candidate lost by nearly 35,000 votes in 1998.

The BJP's hopes this time dwell on the CPI(M) cutting into the steady Congress vote-bank.

Rajasthan

Basic facts

The 1998 election

✱ Rajasthan continues to be Kerala of the north, a phase that began in 1991. The race essentially remains a two-horse one. Barring the likes of Buta Singh and Sis Ram Ola contesting either as Independents or as one-man shows, the Congress and the BJP are the only contenders as the decline of the Janata Dal is complete. From 25.68 per cent that the JD polled in 1989 — winning 11 seats — its vote share was down to 2.16 per cent.

✱ The bipolarity was visibly evident as the BJP polled a healthy 41.65 per cent — down from the 1996 mark by just 0.7 per cent — but the number of its seats went down from 12 to five. In contrast, the Congress increased its votes by 3.94 per cent while winning 18 of the 25 seats — up by six.

✱ The BJP campaign was flawed, unable to contain the strong anti-incumbency factor against the Bhairon Singh Shekhawat government. The Congress projected a new leadership led by Ashok Gehlot and these factors combined to defeat several BJP veterans including star candidate Jaswant Singh, accused of neglecting his constituency.

The 1999 election

✱ The BJP hopes of benefiting from the alternating rule in a two-horse race. It feels that it cannot go any further down from the 1998 mark. The party also hopes to gain on the anti-incumbency factor against the Gehlot government that it says has not been able to do much since December.

✱ The BJP will continue to push Mandalisation in the state by fielding candidates from the backward castes. The strategy devised by Shekhawat and Govindacharya had marginal impact in the November 1998 Assembly elections but is sure to have a long-term effect if pursued.

✱ The Sonia factor worked in the state

last time. The BJP intends countering it with a big build-up of Vajpayee. However, the Congress is buoyed by the return of Buta Singh.

✱ The BJP will also attempt projecting a new leadership in the state.

Mewar

Part of the erstwhile kingdom of Mewar — one of the seven Rajasthani states that upheld Hindu allegiance during the mediaeval period — this region was never easy for the Congress, even when it dominated politics in the state.

Till the Seventies, the Swatantra Party and the Jana Sangh were uniformly spread in the region and the Congress gained mainly because of the split in the anti-Congress votes. That anti-Congress vote has over the years slowly been consolidated into the BJP vote-bank and the party has polled upward of 40 per cent even when its candidates have lost.

Interesting to watch would be Udaipur, from where Girija Vyas lost last time. On the verge of performing a hat-trick, she lost in 1998 to former Assembly Speaker Shantilal Chaplot. The constituency is semi-urban and has ten per cent Scheduled Caste votes. It also has a fair amount of Gujjars and Brahmins, besides Vaishyas and Rajputs. The outcome would greatly depend on candidate selection and their caste profiles.



Jaswant Singh: accused of neglecting his constituency



Policeman guarding a Dangs church after communal attacks: burning issue

Marwar

Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot's charisma, coupled with the state BJP's failure to fine tune its campaign, were the main reasons behind the poor showing of the party. It led to the BJP's virtual rout in 1998 and unless the BJP manages to pull up its socks, the situation is unlikely to be any different.

The party, of course, will bank on the residual anger of the Bishnois at the



Ashok Gehlot: new leadership



Black Buck shooting by film star Salman Khan. Jodhpur and Nagaur are key seats and indicative of the way the region is going to swing. Jodhpur elected Gehlot for the third time in a row in 1998 and the choice of the Congress candidate holds the key this time. In 1998 Gehlot scraped through and the BJP's Bishnoi candidate might turn out to be no pushover if repeated this time.

Eastern Rajasthan

Reflecting the political trends — and



Shankersinh Vaghela: his party drew a blank last time

caste contours — of neighbouring Haryana, this region was among the last regions from where the Janata Dal faded in the state. However, contests are still triangular in many places and vote division has held the key in the past.

In the last elections, the BJP lost Alwar primarily because of internal tussles that led to former MP Mahendra Kumari contesting as an Independent. Even though the sitting MP and Congress veteran Nawal Kishore Sharma did not enter the fray, the BJP candidate came a distant third. Mahendra Kumari narrowly missed the bus and the election this time will be indicative of the BJP's success at putting its house in order.

Gujarat

Basic facts

The 1998 election

☛ The BJP recovered from the Shankersinh Vaghela episode and won 19 of the 26 Lok Sabha seats besides coming back to power in the state. The Congress managed to win seats only from central and eastern Gujarat.

☛ The Rashtriya Janata Party of Vaghela failed to win a single parliamentary seat despite an alliance with the Congress.

The impact of the Dangs controversy will be felt acutely in south Gujarat. The Congress has a chance to capitalise but also has to face the spectre of further Hindu consolidation

The 1999 election

☛ Little change from the situation last time is expected, with the ball in the BJP's court.

☛ The Congress hopes to catch up with the BJP.

☛ Vaghela has lost his way after failing to make headway as part of the Yadav-dominated Rashtriya Loktantrik Morcha at the national level.

Saurashtra

Terra firma for the BJP since the 1991 elections. Prior to that, the Congress had started fading out from 1989. The constituency to watch is Surendranagar, where the Congress lost its last foothold in the region in 1998. Party veteran Sanat Mehta lost to the BJP's Bhavnaben Dave, though not by a comfortable margin. If the Congress has any chance in the region, it is in this seat.

North Gujarat

Another BJP stronghold, dominated by constituencies where the party MPs have retained their seats for two to three terms. Ahmedabad has been represented by Harin Pathak since 1989 despite a Muslim voter strength of 15 per cent. The Congress probably is in with a chance only in Banaskantha, where its sitting MP, B.K. Gadhai, lost in 1998. In 1996, however, the Congress candidate won in a triangular contest that was reduced to bipolar in 1998.

South Gujarat

Partly tribal, also with a high Muslim presence in some constituencies, the region has been loyal to the BJP in the past three elections and the present trends do not indicate otherwise. However, this is where the impact of the Dangs controversy would be felt most acutely.

The Congress has a chance to capitalise but also has to face the spectre of further Hindu consolidation. Surat has been Union minister Kashi Ram Rana's pocket borough since 1989 and he has logged some of the highest victory margins. Last time he won by more than three lakh votes. •

Nitinjan Mukhopadhyay/Mumbai, Jalpur and Gandhinagar

*Understanding the
CPI(M)'s
predicament as it
prepares for the
forthcoming general
elections*

What's

The CPI(M) under general secretary Harkishen Singh Surjeet has never been so loyal to Congress president Sonia Gandhi. Despite the rebuff after the vote-of-confidence — that led to the fall of the BJP-led coalition at the Centre — when the Congress refused to support an alternative government led by the Left, the CPI(M) has once again decided to back the Congress in the forthcoming general elections in September-October.

In the central committee (CC) meeting in early May, held at A.K. Gopalan Bhavan in New Delhi, H.S. Surjeet announced the party's stand to support the Congress in the coming polls. However, the CPI(M) will take on the Congress in states where it is directly contesting against the "secular and democratic forces", he added. The central committee concluded that its "central task" was to defeat the BJP.

Surjeet also said that the party hadn't lost hope of forming an alternative Third Force. The party general secretary and the other members of the CPI(M) politburo believe a Third Front formation would emerge very soon.

In its 16th Party Congress at Calcutta, the CPI(M) had shifted from its earlier stand of describing both the Congress and the BJP as equal evils. In the meet, the party decided to go with the Congress to topple the BJP. At the end of the session, Sitaram Yechury, a politburo member, told SUNDAY that only Congress could provide an alternative government at the Centre — till a Third Front emerged.

But the manner in which the Congress let the CPI(M) down has now raised questions about the line being adopted by Surjeet within the party. The CPI(M)'s inability to thwart the BJP on



TELL ME YOUR DREAMS: Harkishen Singh Surjeet with Jyoti Basu

Left?



CPI(M)'S CHOICE: *Sonia Gandhi*

its own at the Centre is compelling the party to piggyride on the Congress, sources said. "It is wrong to say that we're joining hands with the Congress. It's a political necessity to keep the BJP out," said West Bengal state secretary and politburo member Anil Biswas.

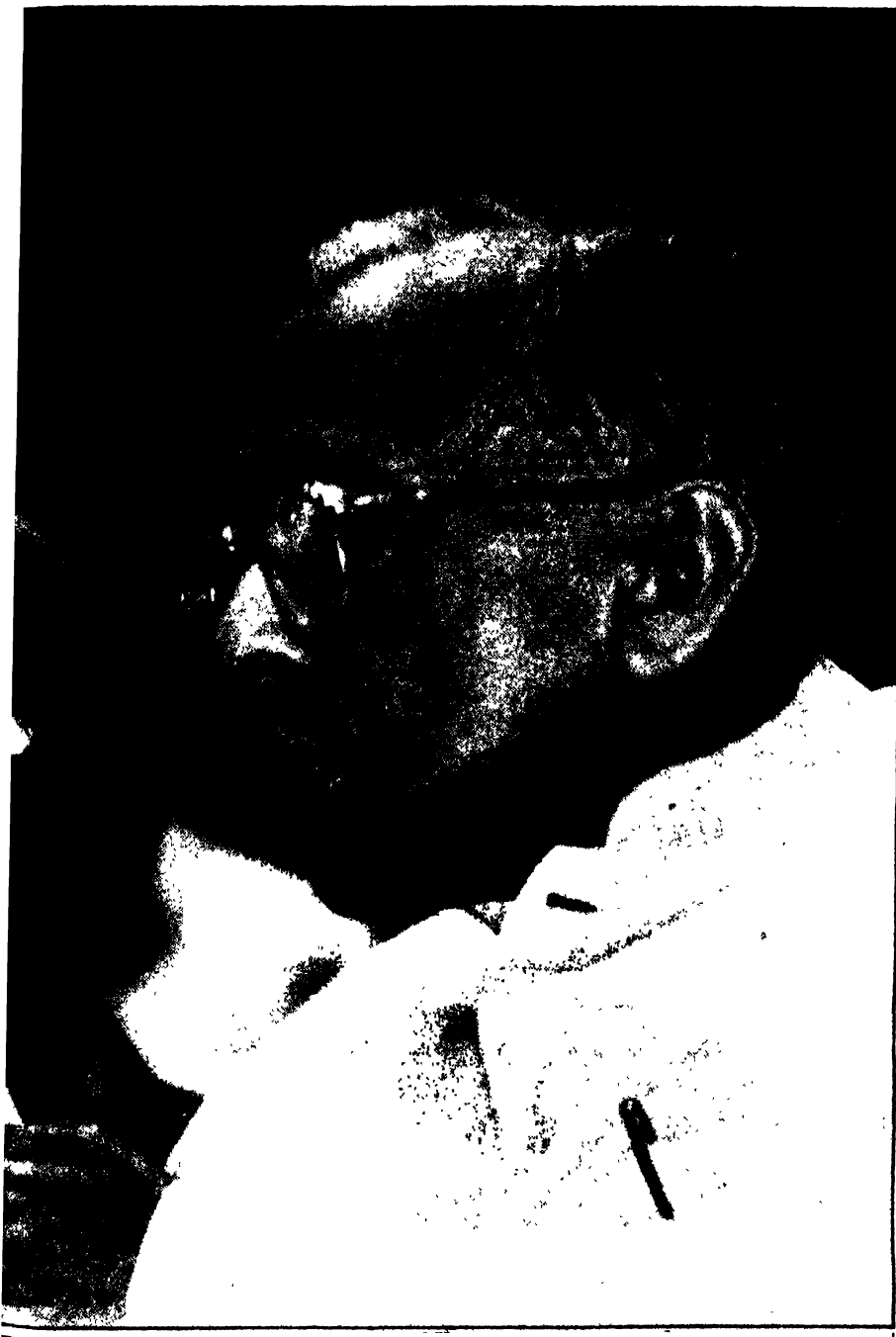
Apparently, Surjeet's line ran into trouble at the CC meeting and was deliberated for long before it was passed. It was opposed by both the West Bengal and the Kerala unit of the party. Some leaders even alluded to go back to the line adopted in the 15th Party Congress at Chandigarh, where the party had decided to maintain equidistance from both the Congress and the BJP. "What do we explain to our voters? After all, if the BJP is a communal force, we're also averse to the economic policy of the Congress," they reasoned.

Some leaders point out that the Congress let the CPI(M) down this time. How can it be trusted again? "The Congress is entirely responsible for the present crisis and forcing an election on the people. They shouldn't have shirked their responsibility. They could have allowed the formation of an alternative government. I believe Sonia was misled," said Somnath Chatterjee, CPI(M) parliamentary party leader.

Realising the disenchantment among the partymen, senior party leaders tried to dilute the situation. Soon after the CC meeting, politburo member Sitaram Yechury said that the CPI(M) was not only against the BJP, but would also attack the Congress for its economic policies. In the same vein, politburo member Prakash Karat said that a pro-Congress stand would affect the CPI(M) votebank in West Bengal and Kerala. So it would oppose the Congress in both the places.

Clearly, Surjeet's pro-Congress line is under fire.

At Muzaffar Ahmad Bhavan, the CPI(M) headquarters in Calcutta,



"It is for the Congress to introspect"

Says veteran CPI(M) parliamentarian Somnath Chatterjee

Sunday: The CPI(M) mobilised secular parties after the BJP-led government fell. But did it apprehend the mess-up that followed?

Somnath Chatterjee: We wanted the BJP government to go. All Opposition parties were against the divisive and sectarian programmes of the BJP. People must understand we didn't bring the government down. It was Jayalalitha's AIADMK which withdrew support. Of course, no sane person can expect the Opposition to vote for the government. At the same time, it's true that we didn't visualise the scenario that emerged after the government fell. I never contemplated that Mulayam Singh Yadav and other Left partners would not support a Congress government. Or that Congress wouldn't support an alternative formation. But even if we had, we wouldn't have voted for the government.

Q: Why is the CPI(M) insisting on a Congress government?

A: We don't insist on a Congress government. In our Party Congress, we made it clear that being the second-largest party in Parliament, the Congress was in the best position to form a government.

Q: Jyoti Basu was selected as PM candidate by the Third Forces. But why wasn't it conveyed to the Congress?

A: There was no Third Front *per se*. By 25 April, it became clear that

Congress couldn't form a government. Soon, many leaders of the secular and Left parties proposed that they were ready to support a government led by Jyoti Basu. The politburo's position too was very clear. It's just that they sat over the matter and waited for the Congress to act. The Congress knew everything yet it didn't agree to support, what can I say?

Q: Considering the possibility of a hung Parliament again, will the Congress and the CPI(M) correct the past mistakes?

A: (Laughing) Well, without accepting that my party made any mistakes, it is true that in the last seven years we have had a very unstable period in Indian politics. As a result of which political corruption has risen and the Congress has been eaten hollow; communalism of BJP has become a major threat; the

quality of parliamentary politics has deteriorated; and political parties have lost moral values.

True, no single party will have a pronounced majority in Parliament in the coming elections. So I only



SOMNATH CHATTERJEE: Talking turkey

hope that secular forces will come together and form an alternative government.

Q: But Sonia Gandhi has once again declared that the Congress will go alone in the hustings...

A: Well, she has to go alone. By no means, we're an electoral ally of the Congress.

Q: Isn't there a dichotomy in the CPI(M)'s stand? In West Bengal

the same uneasiness prevails among the state Marxists. The CPI(M) mandarins are yet to get over the Surjeet-engineered April drama. The situation has been further worsened by chief minister Jyoti Basu's attack against the Congress and the Left allies.

Basu is peeved. So much so that he refused to campaign for the party during the recent civic polls; he didn't attend

the CC meeting (on poor health grounds); and also hit out against Left allies, Forward Bloc and Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP). What's worse, Basu is said to have expressed dissatisfaction about the manner in which Surjeet handled the situation after the trust vote.

Speaking at a function organised by the Paschim Banga Ganatantrik Mahila

Samity, Basu said: "It's my bad luck that I got embroiled in the whole drama. But these people failed to understand the need of the hour." He blamed the Third Force and the Congress for failing to put up a coalition government to prevent the BJP from running a caretaker government in the run up to the polls.

In 1996, Basu was equally vitriolic. He blamed the CPI(M) hardliners for

and Kerala, it's opposing the Congress, but at the national level it's willing to support a Congress government?

A: I think people will appreciate this. When we have to choose between the greater evil and the lesser evil, this is the only viable line. However, our voters know that just like we oppose the BJP, we also oppose the economic policies of the Congress.

The voters of this country have been exercising their franchise in a most thoughtful manner. After all, the fractured Parliament, over the years, is not an accident. It just proves that people are not swayed by any sympathy waves: neither for the BJP, nor for the Congress. It's surprising that the BJP is banking on a sympathy wave. What sympathy are they talking about?

Q: But what about the Left unity? It's under threat.

A: I'm sure this problem will be settled. The FB and the RSP have their own policies but it has got nothing to do with the Left unity. Our Left Front will remain united. And they will never act against the interests of the Left forces.

Q: Do you believe there is a Third Front?

A: You see, the Third Front has to come up in this country. There is no doubt that the support-base of both the BJP and the Congress is dwindling. The rise of regional parties prove that. And I feel after the elections, the Third Force will begin to take shape. So I insist that all the anti-BJP forces should come together to give an alternative government at the Centre. •



WHO'S THE ENEMY?: H.S. Surjeet, A.B. Vajpayee and L.K. Advani

preventing him from taking up the top job of the country. He called the entire fiasco a 'historic blunder'. But this time, the party politburo had cleared Basu for the top post. Then what went wrong?

Apparently, April 1999 was a 'historic confusion'. While the politburo had cleared Basu's candidature as PM, a communication gap with the Congress botched up the entire operation. While the CPI(M) was keeping Basu ready as PM, it decided to announce the candidature only after the Congress conveyed to the CPI(M) that it was unable to form a government and would support a CPI(M)-led alternative formation from outside, disclosed a Left leader.

Anticipating such a move by the Congress, the CPI(M) delayed their decision till 7 pm on 25 April. But no such communication came from the Congress high command. Instead, Sonia Gandhi went to the President saying that the Congress was unable to form a government and would not seek support from outside to form one — a move that queered the Left's pitch.

Sonia's statement came like a bolt from the blue to the CPI(M) mandarins and other secular forces. Though publicly they blamed the Congress for messing up an opportunity to form a secular democratic government, in private they

knew that the man who jeopardised the entire operation was none other than their own general secretary, Harkishen Singh Surjeet. Because, Surjeet had convinced everyone in the party that if the Congress failed, it was ready to support an alternative formation.

In fact, after the trust vote as the Congress dithered and faced obstacles from the Samajwadi Party, FB and RSP, it became clear that only Basu could lead a non-BJP government. Realising this, Mulayam Singh Yadav called a meeting of all the non-BJP forces at his residence where Chandra Shekhar, Inder Gujral, Deve Gowda, Laloo Prasad Yadav, Jayalalitha, Chandrababu Naidu, M. Karunanidhi, Prafulla Mahanta, H.S. Surjeet, Jyoti Basu and other leaders of the Left allies were present. It was unanimously decided that Basu was their consensus candidate for PM. Chandra Shekhar told Basu: "I am also a leader. But you're the leader of the leaders." That very moment, Surjeet blew his fuse. He insisted that only Congress should be allowed to form the government.

Though Basu didn't say a word, he was angry with Surjeet, sources said. Basu told his confidants that Surjeet unnecessarily "complicated" matters and prevented an alternative formation to come to power. However, CPI(M)

Stop Press: Congress Crisis

What will the CPI(M) do now?

THE TENSION was palpable. H.S. Surjeet, who flew down to Calcutta to attend the CPI(M) state committee meeting, sat glued to the television. Along with him, sat other CPI(M) leaders, shocked and aghast. Sonia Gandhi's resignation as Congress president following the revolt by Sharad Pawar, P.A. Sangma and Tariq Anwar caught the Leftists completely on the wrong foot.

What will happen to the pro-Congress line? This was the question troubling the CPI(M) leadership. Most felt relieved that the CWC had spurned Sonia's resignation. But what if Sonia refused to take up the helm of the Congress, or if the party split?

At the time of going to press, the Marxists refused to make any comment. In the coming CC meeting at Delhi, the party will decide its next course of action. For the moment, it's wait and watch. •



TWO OF A KIND

The Forward Bloc and the RSP think alike

The red signs are ominous: not everything is fine within the Left Front. Last fortnight, West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu lambasted his Left partners — Forward Bloc (FB) and Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) — in a public meeting for not supporting the Congress, after the fall of the BJP-led coalition, to form a government at the Centre. Reacting to Basu's statement, both FB and RSP told SUNDAY that it was not just their political compulsion to maintain the Left unity.

The two junior partners of the CPI(M)-led Left Front in West Bengal are unfazed by the recent developments. The FB maintains that there isn't any need for an understanding with the Congress to defeat the BJP. It doesn't consider the Congress to be a "democratic, secular and a pro-people party". The party's National Council said that any alliance with the Congress will harm the Left movement in the country.

FB leadership feels that the Congress has become isolated from the masses because of its "anti-people and anti-national economic policies, corruption and compromises with communal forces". The FB doesn't find any difference between the Congress and the BJP. "Why should we support the Congress? They ruled the country for more than four decades and the result is only poverty, illiteracy and accumulation of wealth in the hands of the few. We don't believe Congress can be a partner in secular politics," said Debabrata Biswas, the party All India general secretary and Rajya Sabha MP.

Unlike the CPI(M), which considers the BJP to be a communal party, the FB has an altogether different perception. "We believe like the Congress, the BJP too is a bourgeois party. We don't grade the BJP and the Congress as enemy No 1 and enemy No 2 respectively. We treat both of them equally," added Debabrata Biswas.

The RSP, too, thinks differently from the CPI(M) on the issue of supporting a Congress-led government. "We're part of the Left Front but we have our own fundamental principles of politics. During the Second World War, the communists considered Hitler more dangerous than the British imperialists and decided to support the latter. But we were against both Hitler and the Britishers. Today, the same scenario is repeating. The CPI(M) considers the BJP a greater evil than the Congress. But RSP believes in maintaining equidistance

from both. If Congress has mortgaged the economic and political independence of the country, the BJP is influencing the country on Hindutva lines," said RSP's West Bengal state secretary, Debabrata Banerjee.

"Ousting the BJP from power doesn't mean installing another corrupt and discredited party of the capitalist class, the Congress(I), to power with the assistance of the Left parties," Banerjee pointed out. The RSP central committee feels that the CPI(M)'s policy of moving towards the Congress would make the Left irrelevant in national politics. The party underlines that "there is no justification for the Left to support the same Congress that has initiated retrograde economic policies by inviting foreign economic subjugation".

Of late, the CPI(M) leadership's diatribes against its two allies have raised doubts about the Left unity. Jyoti Basu's statements have hurt the

ASHOK GHOSH



DEBABRATA BANERJEE





The CPI(M) believes that the Third Force still exists. But it's just not as cohesive as it was in 1996. Because, in the last three years, the Third Force comprising regional outfits have developed strong biases

RSP and FB. Though the two allies have not hit out against the CPI(M), it has made it very clear that onus of maintaining the Left unity does not depend entirely on them. "The Left parties work together on the basis of a common minimum programme and have differences in basic fundamental policies. The RSP believes that the Left Front should be more of a Front and less of a party," said Debabrata Banerjee.

He added: "True, the CPI(M) has its own policies, but it shouldn't jeopardise the unity. It's not just in our interest to maintain the unity. It's even the CPI(M)'s compulsion to do so."

The FB leaders said that Jyoti Basu's statements would only benefit the enemies of the Left. "What can we do if Basu speaks like that? We can only say that such words would weaken the foundation of the Left unity. In politics, we function according to our own party policies and don't believe in succumbing to pressures," said FB West Bengal state secretary Ashok Ghosh.

But what if there is a hung Parliament again? The two Left partners stand firm. They said that before the polls, they would oppose not only the BJP but also the Congress. And after the polls, they will do the same. The only alternative, according to them, is a Left-led democratic Third Front. An idea that the two Left partners also consider to be an alternative proposition.

CLASS OF '96: The United Front leaders

apparatchiks vehemently denied this. "How can you blame Surjeet for this? The Congress being the largest party, it was their responsibility to form the government. But they completely misread the situation," said politburo member Biman Bose.

The Left partners, however, do not think in the same manner. Forward Bloc general secretary Debabrata Bishwas, RSP MP Abani Roy, CPI general secretary A.B. Bardhan have all blamed Surjeet and CPI(M) for failing to convince the Congress and Sonia to support a non-BJP government. Bardhan even said that "secular forces" depended too much on Surjeet, which it shouldn't.

No wonder, the April crisis has left a bitter taste in the mouth of many a CPI(M) leader. And today, as the CPI(M) prepares for the forthcoming general elections, a section of the CPI(M) is putting pressure on the party leaders to revitalise the Third Force. They believe that the CPI(M) should not be entirely at the mercy of the Congress — in case there is a hung Parliament. In other words, Surjeet's line shouldn't be taken for granted.

Said a livid Left leader: "Time and again after the trust vote, Surjeet told Basu to bring his West Bengal partners (FB and RSP) in line, since they were becoming the main obstacles in his path. Surjeet assured that other secular forces were willing to go with his gameplan. Basu told him not to worry and that FB and RSP would come round. And look, what Surjeet's done. He completely misled us. Instead of waiting for the Congress to act, we would now like an alternative force to emerge."

But the question remains: is there any Third Front? The CPI(M) leadership

believes that the Third Force still exists. And that it's just not as cohesive as it was in 1996. In the last three years, party leadership said, the constituents of the Third Force, who are mainly regional outfits, have developed strong biases. "These outfits should overcome their regional, sectarian and casteist bias and forge a strong alternative with the Left. Once we can formulate a common minimum programme, there is a possibility of a Third Force," pointed out Biman Bose.

However, there is disgruntlement and disunity among the Left constituents. The CPI(M) believes it's a passing phase. "In the early Sixties, the Left parties blamed each other. But all that was sorted out in 1977, when we formed the Left Front government in West Bengal. In 1971, we had failed to combine our forces, if we had succeeded, the Front would have born in that year itself," said Nirupam Sen, a central committee member.

"Just as people learn from experiences, political outfits learn too. Our constituents are the best judge. But I feel if there is a hung Parliament again, the non-BJP parties should stick together for secular interests of the party," said Biman Bose.

Sounds optimistic. But the truth is: the Left has run into an ideological crisis. This was evident from the mood prevailing in the party as it prepared itself for the two-day state committee meeting in Calcutta, which was presided by Harkishen Singh Surjeet. Moreover, what's worse, not all Left allies are thinking the CPI(M) way (See box).

Meanwhile, insiders feel, the CPM is on its way to repeat history. They compelled Jyoti Basu to miss the bus twice. And they might again find themselves at crossroads after the 1999 general elections. •

Arindam Sarkar/Calcutta

PAY UP, OR PERISH

How the communications minister managed to recover a part of the dues from private telecom operators

The Bharatiya Janata Party government, in its 13-month tenure, has shown a keen interest in the telecom and information technology sector. It has boldly grappled with a number of tricky issues which the previous government had either deliberately neglected or chose to buy time. However, the bold moves taken by the BJP has not helped the growth of the telecom sector, but has set certain precedents which could be detrimental to the future of the telecom sector.

The party has had three communications ministers — Buta Singh, Sushma Swaraj and Jagmohan. While the first two did not propose or implement any significant policy decisions, the latter managed to announce a number of policy decisions and draw out a part of the outstanding dues from private telecom operators.

On 25 January, 1999, Jagmohan sent letters to private telecom operators, both fixed-line and mobile cellular, to pay up their outstanding dues with interest up to 31 March, 1999, or face encashment of their bank guarantee and cancellation of licence. Jagmohan, well-known for his shrewd bureaucratic tactics, asked operators to "establish their bonafide" and pay up 20 per cent of the outstanding dues, securing the balance by enhancing the financial bank guarantee with validity up to 30 June, 1999.

The operators opposed such a move, but Jagmohan remained adamant. One after another, private telecom companies

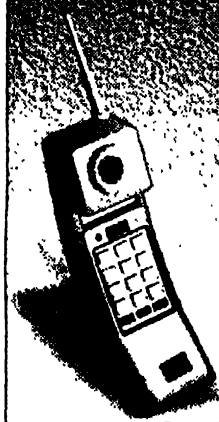
paid up the 20 per cent, although a few approached the courts.

The private telecom companies that were given licences in 1996-97 for operating both cellular and fixed telephones have to pay a licence fee. The licence fee, which had to be paid on a yearly basis earlier, is now valid for a period of 10 years for cellular operators and 15 years for basic operators. Those who fail to pay up by the due date will have to pay a penalty as per norms set by State Bank of India.

A few operators who had paid the first



TALK SHOW



Basic service operators	Licence fee outstanding (Rs crore)	20 per cent dues (Rs crore)	Circle/ city
Hughes Ispat	397	84.47	Maharashtra
Vodafone	103.70	20.74	Gujarat
Bharti Telent	18.70	4.15	Madhya Pradesh
Tata Teleservice	128.00	24.00	Andhra Pradesh
Kesar Comvision	132.74	26.20	Punjab
Cellular	Licence fee outstanding (Rs crore)	20 per cent dues (Rs crore)	Metro operators
Bharti Cellular	63.40	6.25	Delhi
Kesar (Sterling)	51.10	4.18	Delhi
BPL Mobile	70.80	5.70	Mumbai
Nutshell Max	75.90	6.25	Mumbai
Modi Teletra	17.70	3.40	Calcutta
Usha Martin	11.10	0.23	Calcutta
Sivcon	13.30	1.27	Chennai
MTG cellular	10.90	0.62	Chennai
Total	129.44	25.88	



Communications minister Jagmohan (second from right) with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee

would be given to the operators. While the private cellular operators had requested for a two-year moratorium and extension of licence period from the existing 10 years to 15 years, fixed line operators had asked for a moratorium of two years to pay the licence fee.

However in October 1998, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee at the time of inaugurating the annual session of Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industries (FICCI) announced that a Group on Telecommunications (GoT) would be set up to recommend a new National Telecom Policy (NTP). This group was also asked to take up the issues related to basic and cellular service operators and suggest remedial measures within the framework of new NTP.

Earlier, both the Bureau of Industrial Cost and Prices (BICP) appointed by the government and ICICI, appointed by industry to look into the balance sheets

In spite of the Prime Minister's advice to consider the operators' request to extend the licence period, Jagmohan ruled out any concession to them

year's licence fee, in 1997-98, requested Department of Telecommunications (DoT) to extend the date for paying up by end of the second year. Cellular operators pleaded for a moratorium of two years and extension of licence period from 10 to 15 years, since they were unable to make any profit from the services as expected.

However, DoT refused to show any leniency and stressed that companies should pay their licence fee with interest. On refusal, DoT even made a move to encash the bank guarantee of JT Mobi-

les, the cellular operator in Karnataka. The company moved High Court and got a stay on DoT's move to encash the bank guarantee. This happened under the United Front government.

When the BJP government came to power in March 1998, Sushma Swaraj who took over as the communications minister from Buta Singh said the issue of cellular and basic operators would be considered. But when Jagmohan took over from her, he maintained that no moratorium for payment of licence fee or extension of licence period years

and performance of the company, had suggested that cellular operators had made less profit than projected in the plan proposals. The then secretary, DoT, Anil Vinayak Gokak, had said,

"We understand the problems of private operators and some oxygen is needed to help them, which is being explored by the government," suggesting that relief is underway for the cellular operators. However, his transfer to the ministry of fertilisers a few months before the exit of Sushma Swaraj from the ministry, put the whole issue in the back burner.

In spite of the Prime Minister's advice



to consider the operators' request, communications minister Jagmohan ruled out any concessions to the private telecom operators. "We were assured that some kind of relief would be granted, based on the suggestion of BICP and ICICI report, and PM's GoT submitted to the government. But when Mr Jagmohan repeatedly expressed his opinion at various forums and also at GoT meetings, we were convinced that things would go wrong for us," said T.V. Ramachandran, vice-chairman, Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI).

Jagmohan argued, firstly, the government has no option but to enforce the terms and conditions of licence in toto as no deviations from the provision of the licence agreements is legally or constitutionally permissible, and secondly, any concessions given to the licencees would be against the norms of a healthy business and could send wrong signals to the market. An impression would be made that terms and conditions of licence-agreements signed with the government need not be taken seriously. Thirdly, the dues from the operators on licence fee have nothing to do with new NTP, a retrospective benefit cannot be applied in this case. And lastly, the issue is bound to be raised in Parliament and there is every risk of government's image being undermined if non-recovery of huge amount continues.

The final blow came on 25 February, 1999, when a notice was received by all cellular and basic operators from DoT, to pay the licence fee with interest or pay 20 per cent of the outstanding dues and secure the balance by enhancing the financial bank guarantee to cover the remaining 80 per cent with validity up to 30 June, 1999.

The government's move to make the operators cough up 20 per cent of the outstanding dues, according to telecom analysts, was aimed to break the operators' cartel. "The government was aware of the difference in profit performance of operators and knew that even if one pays, the other will have to pay or face the consequence. This is what exactly happened. When Bharti, the cellular operator in Delhi and fixed telephone operator in Madhya Pradesh, decided to pay the 20 per cent, others were left with no choice," said N. Bhaskara Rao, chairman, Media Development Research Association (MDRA).

DoT set a deadline of 15 February, 1999 for payment of the 20 per cent. Or else, the operators would have to face



action as per the licence norms. The private telecom operators were still hopeful of a favourable situation emerging from the imbroglio and strongly lobbied with the Prime Ministers Office (PMO). There was a considerable pressure from the PMO to extend at least the deadline. Jagmohan finally relented but not completely.

The deadline was extended till 28 February, 1999 with a promise that no punitive action will be taken against the companies who come forward to pay up 20 per cent even if the payment is to be made at a later stage. This was against the PMO's advice and the operators' request to extend the deadline till 31 March, 1999. The operators were hoping that if they manage to get an extension till 31 March, 1999, the new NTP will be announced and there might be some relief for them in it.

Jagmohan's stand, not to give any extension, paid off. About 12 operators paid up 20 per cent of the outstanding dues before 28 February, 1999 and others grudgingly followed. Meanwhile DoT had issued orders for termination of licences of defaulters, which failed to fall in line. DoT also issued liquidated damages claim to basic operators for non-implementation of village private telephone network deadline and delays in commercial launch of services.

"This was totally unexpected, there was no balance in collection of dues. Some operators had a few crores as outstanding dues while some had more than 20 crore but the 20 per cent was taken from both," said Ramachandran.

Out of about six companies which were given licences for offering fixed telephone services, only Bharti Telenet (Madhya Pradesh) has launched its servi-



The companies moved the court. Undeterred, Jagmohan ordered cancellation of licences. He has already cancelled the licences of Hughes Ispat, the letter-of-intent-holder in Karnataka for providing fixed telephone services, Koshika in Bihar, JT Mobile cellular operator in Karnataka, and Aircell Digilink, the cellular operator in Rajasthan, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh (East).

In March 1998, communications minister Sushma Swaraj said the issue of cellular and basic operators would be considered. But she did not propose or implement any significant policy decisions

ces while the others, Tata Teleservices (Andhra Pradesh), Essar Comvion (Punjab), Hughes Ispat (Maharashtra), Reliance (Gujarat) and Koshika in Bihar have either set up their networks or are conducting pilot services. Some of the companies are also awaiting clearances from the government to launch commercial services.

Infuriated by DoT's move, four operators — Birla AT&T (cellular operator in Gujarat and Maharashtra), Tata Teleservices, Hughes Ispat and Essar Comvion (all fixed telephone service providers) moved Delhi High Court and managed to get a stay, but for a brief period. Delhi High Court rejected their contention and asked them to pay up the licence fee.

In mid-April the new National Telecom Policy was announced, addressing all the issues. However, it was silent

about the request of private telecom operators. The matter was referred to Auditor General of India, who was asked to submit his report within four weeks. (The report is expected to be tabled by the end of May). The report is to be implemented within one week of submission and Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) is supposed to announce the new tariff by 30 June, 1999 as per new NTP.

In the last week of April, DoT asked the operators to pay the remaining 80 per cent or threatened to encash the bank guarantee. Hughes Ispat, Koshika, JT Mobile, Aircell Digilink were issued show-cause notices saying that they have to pay up 20 per cent and the deadline expires on 14 May, 1999.

Another letter was sent by DoT on 26 May, 1999 to five cellular operators — Escotel, RPG, Reliance, Tata and BPL.

Interestingly, last week DoT gave an extension of six months to pay up licence fee to Srinivas Telecom, the cellular operator in Tamil Nadu. "We had consulted the Auditor General following request from the company and found that there was delay on the part of Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB), due to which the company had suffered. So we extended the deadline for payment of licence fee," said a senior official in DoT.

The move has been welcomed by all in the industry, along with a demand that all the companies which had suffered due to such delays in getting clearance from the government should be given extension. "We welcome the move, it indicates a positive change in the government's attitude towards telecom operators. We believe this to be the crucial turning point in the trouble saga of telecom reforms in India, which started nearly a decade ago," according to Association of Basic Telecom Operators (ABTO).

COAI was also quick to respond. "We welcome the move to offer extension to Srinivas Telecom and hope that the same yardstick would be used for others who could not set up their network due to various types of delays by different departments of the government," said Ramachandran.

Will the government get the Auditor General's report by the end of this month? Will the report announce relief to operators? Will TRAI announce the tariff in time, under new revenue-sharing formula? In the present scenario, these are issues pregnant with possibilities of throwing up surprises. •

Rajendran/New Delhi

Save the game

Gizmos and gimmicks should not be allowed to take over cricket

The white flannels were the first to go. Then, the red ball. Gradually, most of the little niceties that helped elevate cricket to a pedestal of sportsmanship have been done away with. The last straw, perhaps is the Bob Woolmer gadget which threatens to yank the willow sport out of its roots and make it a mere adjunct to an electronic gizmo.

South Africa's coach of five years first tried to whittle the game down to complicated statistical data and remove cricket's "glorious uncertainties". His latest ploy, however, threatens to destroy the spirit of the game. After secretly trying out a one-way radiophone system with his captain at home and during practice matches in England, Woolmer had captain Hansie Cronje and strike bowler Allan Donald sport kinky ear-attachments in South Africa's World Cup opener against India.

The move would have gone unnoticed, but for a television camera picking up Cronje's striped concoction on his left ear. An alert match referee questioned the team management and ordered the equipment removed. For the South Africans, it seemed the most natural thing to do, following certain technology-tuned American sport.

But then, everything that is not illegal is not necessarily fair. There is no point in naming a captain if the proceedings are to be conducted by the coach or manager or planning team or whatever.

Although the Proteas' bid to take unfair advantage of electronics has been thwarted, their reactions clearly reveal their mindset. Not only do they feel they did nothing wrong, some of them even planned to seek ICC permission to continue the use of the radiophone.

To the South Africans, everything seems fair as long as it helps their team win. And in this, they come nowhere near Australia, more particularly, their self-styled master of spin, Shane Warne.

Starting out with a sensationally wide repertoire, Warne soon emerged as the biggest Australian cricket hero. Unfortunately, he began to believe in the hype surrounding him and proceeded to flout every sporting norm.

He alleged that Pakistani cricketers



Bob Woolmer with Hansie Cronje: wrong lessons

South African coach Bob Woolmer had captain Hansie Cronje and strike bowler Allan Donald sport kinky ear-attachments in the World Cup opener against India



were involved in betting. Soon, it was revealed that he was among those Aussies supplying information to bookies in lieu of money.

Then came his tie-up with a company exhorting him to give up smoking for four months in order to earn a substantial sum of money. What he did privately, no one knows. But even publicly, he did smoke before the period elapsed. And yet, he is reported to have collected the money.

But his most infamous deeds were to openly demand sledging rights and, at the same time, attack a rival team captain. Australians are the past masters in gamesmanship, particularly when appealing for a decision. Though more cowardly is the constant stream of abuse from close-in fielding positions in order

to disturb a batsman's concentration. The ICC's decision to keep the wicket microphones on is obviously a distressing development for these unsporting cricketers.

Warne's worst deed was to openly criticise Sri Lanka captain Arjuna Ranatunga. The latter was unsporting, to say the least, when he threatened to pull his team out when Muttiah Muralitharan was no-balled by the umpire. But Warne, spitting venom in print, was infinitely worse.

The ICC handed him a two-match suspended sentence besides a fine. It will be interesting to see what the Australian Cricket Board does, apart from an eye-wash of an admonition. •

Arjit Sen/Calcutta

WEST BENGAL Sudden impact

*The Centre asks Governor
A.R. Kidwai to quit*

It was 10 May. For the caretaker BJP-led government, the timing couldn't have been better. West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu was preparing to leave for London the next evening and the Governor of the state, A.R. Kidwai, was holidaying in Darjeeling. It was then that the terse directive came from Union home ministry, asking Kidwai to quit as Governor of West Bengal. He rushed back to Calcutta and faxed his resignation letter to the President. As Kidwai prepared to leave and refused to speak to reporters, his secretary Arka Prabha Deb pointed out that it was a routine transfer and that it was due since August last year.

But the Basu-led Left Front government took strong exception to the Union home ministry's action. Speaking to reporters before leaving for London, a furious Basu said that the Centre's action was "indecent and violated all democratic norms". "Neither the home minister nor any official from his office informed me about Kidwai's transfer," said a seething Basu.

Apparently, on the night of 10 May, a junior-level secretary had called Kidwai and asked him to quit. Later, the Governor's secretary called the chief minister and informed him about the development. Later, Kidwai also spoke to Basu, who, insiders say, asked the Governor to accept the directive as he was a gentleman. "We are pained that he had to leave under such circumstances," said Basu.

Equally aggressive was Basu's second-in-command and state home (police) minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee. From his office at Writers' Buildings, Bhattacharjee launched a scathing attack against the Centre. "It's an uncivilised act. The Centre didn't even feel it necessary to inform the chief minister or me. Instead, some Tom, Dick and Harry called up from Delhi and asked the Governor to quit," said an angry Bhattacharjee.

"Never before has a Governor been removed in West Bengal in such a manner," said Anil Biswas, CPI(M) state secretary and Politburo member. Biswas met Jyoti Basu at the airport before the latter boarded his flight to London. The next day, the party organised a protest rally at Subodh Mullick Square in central Calcutta. At the meeting, attended by Biswas and Biman Bose, a memorandum addressed to the President was read out, urging him to "restrain the caretaker government from taking such drastic actions".

Apart from the CPI(M), other Left Front allies like the CPI, the Forward Bloc and the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) also criticised the action of the central government. "This is just not done. How could the Centre take such an

action without consulting the chief minister and his administration?" said RSP state secretary Debabrata Bandyopadhyay. CPI general secretary A.B. Bardhan pointed out that the matter would be taken up by the Left and other secular parties with the President.

The state Congress, too, criticised the manner in which the BJP government went ahead to dismiss Kidwai. The Congress described the action as "undemocratic" and "complete abuse of power". Pranab Mukherjee, Congress general secretary and Rajya Sabha member, said: "There are certain things that the caretaker government can't do, such as transfer of Governors, ambassadors and senior officials. But this government is flouting all such code of conduct."

But the BJP leadership and its ally, Trinamul Congress, do not find anything wrong with the decision. Union power minister Rangarajan Kumaramangalam, who was in Calcutta recently, said that no government — not even a caretaker —



SHOWN THE DOOR: former Governor A.R. Kidwai

could sit idle. He pointed out that the Constitution did not bar the caretaker government from taking such decisions. "In fact, there are precedents. The Inder Kumar Gujral government did change a number of Governors," Kumaramangalam pointed out.

Trinamul Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee justified the decision to remove Kidwai by pointing out that one could not expect all the decisions of the Centre to be convenient for Jyoti Basu and his party. "Was there any justification when chief minister Jyoti Basu and Rabri Devi of Bihar transferred

so many officials? Most importantly, Kidwai's term was over last August. So why are they making such a hue and cry about it?" asked Banerjee.

According to sources, when Kidwai's term as Governor ended in August last year, Basu wanted industrialist Viren Shah to replace him. But Mamata Banerjee didn't approve of the appointment. And that was one reason why the BJP government asked Kidwai to continue. In fact, Mamata shared a cordial relationship with Kidwai. When his term came to an end last August, Kidwai had called up Banerjee. But this time, he didn't have the time. "If he had spoken to me about this development, I would have done something to stall his transfer," Banerjee said.

Meanwhile, on 13 May, a Rashtrapati Bhavan communique said that Shyamal Kumar Sen, acting Chief Justice of Calcutta High Court, was to officiate as Governor of West Bengal till further orders. As it stands, Shyamal Sen will carry on with the job till a new government is formed at the Centre. However, rumour mills are rife as to who would be appointed Governor after the general elections are over.

According to sources, if the BJP-led coalition forms the government at the Centre, then Kailashpati Mishra, the BJP central observer for West Bengal, and party vice-president Jana Krishnamurthy will be the contenders for the post. Of course, one cannot rule out K. Padmanabhaiah, the former Union home secretary in the P.V. Narasimha Rao government.

But all this is in the realm of speculation. This is because in the times to come, whoever assumes office in Calcutta's Raj Bhavan will have to get his file cleared by Mamata Banerjee. •

Arindam Sarkar/Calcutta

ASSAM

Money matters

The Finance Commission is worried about the state's fiscal health

Assam is becoming as a cause for concern for 11th Finance Commission chairman A.M. Khusro. On a recent visit to the state, the veteran economist suggested that Assam, along with other north-eastern states, should evolve a strategy to have common rates and slabs for taxes and duties.

Addressing a meeting between the Commission and the state council of ministers, Khusro pointed out that a trade war was going on among the states in the region in the form of reducing government rates and doling out concessions on duties. He said that a common tax structure would not only improve but would also bring about stability in revenue collection.

Khushro observed that despite being endowed with natural resources, Assam had failed to make rapid strides in the field of development. The growth rate of the state domestic product (SDP) hovered around three per cent during the past decade which was lower than the national level.

The Finance Commission chairman pointed out that Assam's debt burden has been increasing every year and presently it stood at nearly 37 per cent of the net SDP. He said that the growing dependence on debt financing not only increased



FACING FLAK: Prafulla Mahanta

the repayment liability of the principle amount, but also inflated the interest burden. Khusro felt that the state should place more emphasis on generating resources. He also wanted the state to ensure that funds raised through debt were used for building capital assets.

According to Khusro, capital expenditure in Assam was coming down over the years, while at the same time, the revenue expenditure was increasing. He said that this trend had an impact on the pace of development. "Unless this trend is reversed, the state will find it difficult to generate resources needed to meet its normal expenditure," he added.

Red in the face

Supreme Court pulls up the West Bengal CM for alleged violation of land allotment norms

For the Left Front government in West Bengal, this was a May Day with a difference. On 10 May, while the central government decided to remove Governor A.R. Kidwai, a Division Bench of the Supreme Court comprising Justice S.P. Bharucha and Justice M. Srinivasan issued a notice to chief minister Jyoti Basu for violating rules while allotting residential plots at Salt Lake from his discretionary quota.

Notices were also served on five others which included state finance minister Asim Dasgupta, urban development minister Ashoke Bhattacharyya, information & culture and police minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, former state minister Prasanta Sur and the Salt Lake municipality chairman.

Though the state government claimed, at the time of going to press, that it had not received any such notice, the news has already created ripples in the political circles, coming as it did in the run-up to the Lok Sabha elections. Before leaving for London, Basu told reporters: "Yes, their petitions were dismissed by the Calcutta High Court. Now, they have moved the Supreme Court. Our lawyers will fight the case."

The notices were issued after hearing the arguments of

Khusro pointed out that Assam had enough scope for tourism and the state should take steps to exploit these potentials. Commenting on tax revenue, he felt that though it had gone up significantly over the years, there was scope for improvement. He pointed out that the revenue from tax on agricultural income and duty on stamps and registration remained stagnant.

Meanwhile, chief minister Prafulla Mahanta, who holds the finance portfolio, informed the state Assembly that the state government had already taken measures to mobilise internal resources. He said that under the Assam General Sales Tax Act, 1993, the point of levy of tax on the sale of petroleum product has been shifted from first point to last point with effect from 5 June, 1998. This was expected to bring in an additional revenue of Rs 15 crore annually.

The CM also said that a new act — the Assam Taxation (On luxuries) Act, 1997 — was in force since August 1997 which was expected to bring in a revenue of Rs 15 crore in 1998-99.

Even as the CM was busy rattling off figures, the Opposition made a virulent attack on the AGP-led government for crippling Assam's economy. On 19 March, the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) demanded a white paper so that common people could know about the state of affairs. "If they think that eight years are not enough to improve the situation, they should seek fresh mandate from the people," party spokesman Prodyut Bordoloi said at a press conference.

Calling upon the state government to make its stand clear,

petitioners Deepak Ghosh — a retired IAS officer — and Tarak Singh — a Trinamul Congress member. In their petitions, Ghosh and Singh alleged that relatives, friends, members of the CM's personal staff, present and former bureaucrats and state ministers had been given prime residential plots in the posh East Calcutta suburb.

In 1997, Singh had filed a writ petition in Calcutta High Court complaining against the manner in which plots were distributed. He alleged that the beneficiaries had easy

STORM SIGNAL: chief minister Jyoti Basu



MADE TO ORDER: A.M. Khusro

APCC leader Pankaj Bora alleged that the AGP government, which had been blaming the Congress for taking loan from the Peerless, itself has taken a loan of Rs 1,200 crore, including Rs 600 crore as market borrowings, and that too at a rate of interest varying between 12 and 18 per cent.

Official sources said that the home ministry had recently directed the north-eastern states to ensure that the people were informed about the release of funds so that "diversion and mis-utilisation" were prevented. The ministry was, however, worried because the state governments were not keen to carry out this directive. •

Dileep Chandan/Guwahati

access to the CM, which the common people did not have. In February 1999, Justice Pinaki Chandra Ghosh of Calcutta High Court dismissed the petition, citing a previous verdict of Justice Bhagwati Prasad Banerjee, where the chief minister's discretionary power was admitted, as a precedence. He also observed that the people who had been given plots at Salt Lake were not made parties to the case. It was also held that no norms and guidelines were followed while making the allotments.

Singh filed a special leave petition (SLP) in Supreme Court, challenging the High Court judgement. Ghosh, meanwhile, moved the apex court through a public interest petition under Article 32. Shanti Bhusan and Arun Jaitley represented the petitioners in Supreme Court. The petitioners have sought an enquiry into the allotment process.

In his February judgement, Justice Ghosh had noted that Supreme Court had asked the Union government to prepare a guideline for the distribution of LPG dealership and had ordered the state government to draft a guideline for distributing plots at Salt Lake. According to urban development department sources, the guideline is under preparation.

After the notices were issued, Union minister P.R. Kumaramangalam said in Calcutta that in the forthcoming elections, the BJP and its allies will make it a political issue. He also said that the Bihar government and the previous regime in Uttar Pradesh were also reportedly involved in land scams. "We welcome the Supreme Court's notices. The corruption charges against the Jyoti Basu government will be proved when the law takes its own course," Manabendra Banerjee told SUNDAY...

Anand Bhowmik/Calcutta

Body language

Channels beaming sex and sleaze become popular

There are some channels which form the murky underbelly of cable-casting which only come to notice because they purvey sex and sleaze in sizeable doses. These are not channels which come up for mention in genteel gatherings, or in public meetings; they are whispered about among those who surf incessantly in search of sensation.

TB6 is one such channel which has rapidly gained popularity in the last couple of months. During the week, it delivers a blameless mix of news and views and other programming, and on Saturday late nights it offers up straight porn. So starved are Indian viewers of such content that they overlook that TB6 is a Russian channel and the language is alien. When it comes to naked bodies, words are redundant.

There was a time when Jain TV rendered this signal service. But it went off the air before the riotous weeknights



PEEPING TOMS: steamy sequences are sure-shot TRP boosters

could become a fixed ritual. And India's first adults-only channel, Plus 21, has been struggling to make itself visible for a long time now. It periodically makes the odd noise about coming on, and then subsides. Clearly, we are very far from legally-permissible pornography; even close clinches on Star Movies get lopped off before things can get steamy.

All rules are thrown out of the window, though, when it comes to fashion. You station a camera at the end of a ramp, and it has the freedom to record what it will — a succession of pretty young things in their flimsies is only grist to the mill. PTV, or Fashion TV, another of these channels, takes it to the extreme; its models wear a layer of gauze, make-up and nothing much else. It may not be strictly porn, but it can certainly make you hot around the collar. And in other places. •

MADHYA PRADESH

Treasure hunt

A new temple is excavated in Khajuraho

Khajuraho continues to spring surprises. A huge Ninth century temple has recently been excavated in Jatkar village, located around six km away from the temple town. According to P.K. Mishra, superintendent archaeologist of the Bhopal circle of Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), it was during a routine exploratory survey last year that the ASI had identified 18 mounds in and around Khajuraho. Experts feel that these mounds conceal architectural remains belonging to the Chandela period. On 6 March, the ASI started its excavation on the Bijamandal mound, near Jatkar. And their hunch has proved to be correct.

The results were stunning. "There is strong evidence of a hitherto unknown Buddhist influence in the area, indicated by the use of the Buddhist *sunga* period," says Mishra. "The figure of a four-handed *veena*-playing *Saraswati* has been unearthed for the first time."

Excavation no doubt is hard work and with the mercury pushing the 46-47 degrees celsius mark, it became even more gruelling.

The excavation on the mound has so far yielded 124 architectural fragments and sculptures of Vishnu, Shiva, Uma and *Saraswati* along with some erotic figures dating between the late Ninth century and the Eleventh century. These materials have been found in various stages of preservation. As a result, the date of construction of the temple has posed a puzzle for the archaeologists. "This variation was not seen in any other temple," points out Mishra. The digging also revealed a 34-metre-long *jagati* (foundation) with carvings and mouldings, making it the largest among the Khajuraho temples.

A significant amount of new information has been unearthed, literally. Temples at Khajuraho have been divided into eastern, western and southern group of temples. Of the 85 fabled temples, only 25 are known and documented. The newly-excavated Bijamandal temple will be the 26th.

"It is difficult to say whether the Bijamandal temple was also built in the same style as the other temples...whether it was completed at all or it fell down during construction," says ASI director-general Ajay Shanker. "While the *jagati* has been excellently preserved — showcasing high quality of sandstone work — the sculptures found in the rubble were of latter period," Shanker revealed. The *shivalingam* atop the mound is also from a latter period. "We are trying to date the temple with the help of the motifs on the *jagati*, the quality of the sculptures and stone," Shanker adds.

Another interesting revelation is the presence of several representations of *Tirthankaras* (incarnations). "Perhaps, an effort was made by the thinkers of the time to accommodate all the heterogenous sects like Shaivism, Buddhism and Jainism into an all-encompassing homogenous faith," points out an ASI spokesman.

The newly-found temple is now being documented. The ASI is hopeful of finding a Buddhist stupa and inscriptions in a mound located nearby. •

Deeshdeep Saxena/Bhopal



SUNDAY WEEK

KUSUM BHANDARI

BEGINNING 23 MAY, 1999

ARIES

(21 March-20 April)

The world is now your oyster. You only have to apply your will and considerable abilities to the ends you have in mind to be almost certain of realisation. Loved ones will have their feet firmly placed on the ground, allowing them to handle financial matters with confidence.

TAURUS

(21 April-20 May)

Close acquaintances benefit from your generous nature. You will bail them out from tight corners. You have been making a good impression on your employers recently: bonuses or raises are on the cards. New doors can open for you. Be on your toes to seize whatever chances come your way.

GEMINI

(21 May-20 June)

Avoid putting your foot in your mouth. Be courteous. Concentrate on what you do best. A love of some standing can bring you back to earth and put you on the right track. Look after the long-term interest and don't be fooled by glamour and promises. A home move is most likely to materialise.

CANCER

(21 June-20 July)

Have a firm grasp on financial matters. Put yourself into a strong position in business. Keep your ear to the ground for useful tips and hints concerning new investment possibilities. Information that comes your way now will be worth acting upon.

LEO

(21 July-20 August)

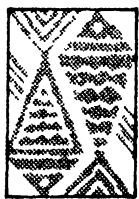
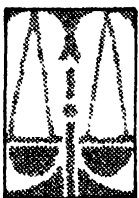
People dependent on you need your reassurance and more of your time. Don't shun responsibilities that you must bear. Your opponents may be conspiring against you. But you will ward them off with consummate ease. Opportunities to travel should be taken seriously.



LIBRA

(21 September-20 October)

Your whole life can come into clearer focus. Long-standing problems can suddenly be resolved. Now is the time to ask for return favours from friends if they are indebted to you. People will be more accepting of you in response to a less critical attitude on your part. Pay them a compliment.



SAGITTARIUS

(21 November-20 December)

Clear the decks of current and outstanding affairs before taking on new responsibilities. There'll be a complete mess if you allow too much to pile up on your desk. Extra effort put in at work can be rewarding both in terms of personal satisfaction and in bonus payments. Property deals are favoured.

CAPRICORN

(21 December-20 January)

Contact people in key positions, living or working in distant places. You may now get answers you have been waiting for from influential people. Don't commit yourself to new contracts or responsibilities, especially those that are likely to hang round your neck for a long time to come.

AQUARIUS

(21 January-20 February)

Take out time for yourself and withdraw into peace and solitude. This should allow you to get your thoughts and feelings sorted out. Some stealth and cunning may be required to make the most of new business opportunities. Private discussions can help to clinch transactions or agreeable terms.

PISCES

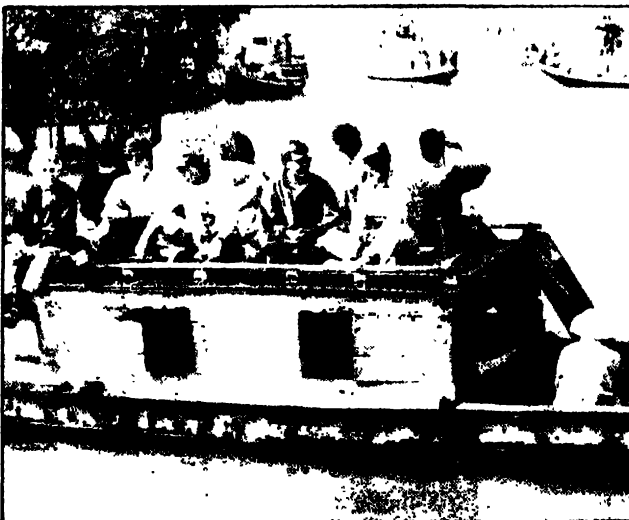
(21 February-20 March)

You may get carried away by excitement and enthusiasm to the detriment of your new career. Take things one step at a time. Be realistic. Too much optimism can make you careless, and will probably raise the suspicions of influential people. •

Playing to the media?

A fight has broken out between two rival groups of tour operators in India. Members of the Indian Association of Tour Operators, headed by veteran tour operator Subhash Goyal, have taken strong exception to their president's statements that the Indian tourism industry is dead.

A founder member and past president, Ram Kohli,



Foreign tourists in India: they are coming

has strongly criticised the manner in which Goyal has sounded dire warnings about the drop in tourist arrivals in India. Kohli denies any such thing and says that the government must step in to demand an explanation from Goyal who is making alarmist statements with the sole purpose of appearing on TV and in newspaper columns.

According to Kohli, this is not the first time Goyal has done this: he issued similar statements when the BJP government assumed office. Even if tourist arrivals have come down, which they haven't, should Goyal be issuing statements which hurt the trade?

Subhash Goyal is yet to reply to this rebellion in his backyard.

HEARD IN NEW DELHI

However much we may respect the judgements of the Supreme Court, we cannot accept a judgement which puts the cart before the horse.

A CAR MANUFACTURER, ON THE SUPREME COURT'S INSISTENCE ON IMPLEMENTING EURO I AND EURO II POLLUTION NORMS WHEN THE CAR INDUSTRY WAS IN A RECESSION

Mutual transfers

Why was member (personnel) of the Central Board of Direct Taxes, V.M. Muthuramalingam, made member (judicial)?

The kindest way of describing this obvious demotion is that the member (judicial) also has a lot of power and responsibility. The fact is that Muthuramalingam goofed.

As member (personnel), he thought he could effect transfers and postings of

income tax officials without referring the matter to the finance ministry.

So he did everything on his own and the announcement that IT officials had been transferred was as much a surprise to CBDT chief Ravi Kanth as it was to the ministry. Both were furious when they heard of it.

So, Muthuramalingam has been divested of that responsibility.

Renewed interest

The Ambani-owned Observer group of publications last week saw the quiet inclusion in the printer's line of the name of Reliance's Delhi-based pointsman Tony Jesudasan as the new managing editor of *The Sunday Observer* and *The Observer of Business and Politics*.

The old guard which has been running the *Observer* unchallenged is understandably nervous, not knowing whether Jesudasan's entry signifies renewed interest by the Ambanis in the media business or whether it is meant to herald their eventual exit.

The last time Jesudasan forayed into the *Observer* was in the early Nineties. He is credited with cold-bloodedly closing down the *Observer Channel*, a video newsmagazine which was unable to fight competition from satellite television.

To be fair to the man, even his critics admit that he is a veritable collector of information and stories, most of which he planted assiduously in Delhi's media, earning him the soubriquet "chairman-cum-managing director of the Plantation Corporation of India".

Perhaps now some of these stories will find their way into the *Observer* publications. •

CHECK-LIST

The Sensex and the BJP

■ **11 May, 1998:** India tests the nuclear bomb. The market crashes.

■ **5 October, 1998:** The US 64 hits the markets. It seems impossible to retrieve the Sensex. A black week at the bourses.

■ **27 February, 1999:** Desperately seeking stability, the Sensex clutches at an investor-friendly Budget and rallies.

■ **17 April, 1999:** The BJP government loses the vote of confidence. Fearing another bout of instability, the Sensex crashes, causing a loss of crores of rupees.

■ **14 May, 1999:** The liberating moment. The market realises that the political situation is not as bad as they thought. Foreign institutional investors buy, pushing the Sensex beyond the 4,000 mark. The final break between economy and politics.

Wrong move

There hasn't been a more inept government in India than the BJP's.

Just consider the fracas over the appointment of governors. First, the BJP sacked one, the West Bengal governor, via a message from a junior official in the home ministry. The governor quit amidst widespread indignation and outcry about the BJP's manners.

But what did we do wrong, asked BJP leaders plaintively. Kidwai's term had ended so we asked him to leave. True, but then the term of two governors (Mata Prasad, governor at Arunachal Pradesh and Kidwai) ended in August-September last year. So what was the logic in dismissing them now?

Okay, so Kidwai was a gentlemen and he quit. But Mata Prasad, who has been a bureaucrat, dug in and said he won't quit till the President asked him to. The President hasn't. So the BJP government looks like a fool.

Home minister L.K. Advani's stand is that because his party and he opposed the gubernatorial appointments made by I.K. Gujral (he got the Gujral appointees to quit when the BJP came to power), it didn't lie in his mouth to appoint governors when his government was caretaker. Then why get governors' posts vacated? We now have the moral high ground, says the BJP righteously.

Conspiracy theorists should discount the line that the President had anything to do with this decision of the government. In fact, when Atal Behari Vajpayee met the President, Narayanan told him that the BJP should go ahead with the appointments. He also suggested that it would do no one any harm if the BJP appointed a Dalit governor or two.

HEARD IN NEW DELHI

**Till now, NATO was only famous.
Now it's NATO-rious**

AN ASIAN DIPLOMAT CRITICISING NATO'S
ACTIONS IN SERBIA



L.K. Advani raising a controversy

BJP observers attribute this change of heart on the home ministry's part, to the public anger over the manner of Kidwai's sacking. Why does the BJP have an obsession with shooting itself in the foot?

From a Jat

Few people know the minister of state for Agriculture, Som Pal, is a superb raconteur, especially of his jokes. The thing about him

is that they're usually directed against the Jats themselves. This is the story he told the meeting of the council of ministers which was convened after the government lost the confidence vote by one.

Som Pal saw the long faces at the meeting and decided to cheer them up. He told of a village near Rohtak (Haryana), a Jat's house caught fire and everything was destroyed: the grain, the stored behind his house, the charpals (beds), quilts, blankets, everything went up in smoke.

Neighbors went to commiserate with the Jat, but they found him in a good mood, distributing cold drinks and food to the visitors. They sat round, looking mournful while the man who had lost everything flitted from guest to guest, humming to himself.

One of his guests, peeved at his behaviour asked him what he was being so cheerful about. He explained: "It is true that my house caught fire, the roof collapsed, my quilts and charpals were destroyed. But I can't help thinking what life was like when I had everything. We had so many rats in this house. They used to burrow into the grain, eat holes into the quilts they wouldn't let us sleep and they wouldn't let us sleep. They used to somersault in the air all night long."

"So," he said, "if I've lost my house, at least I have the satisfaction of knowing that those insidious rats have met their fate."

He said Sompal, consoling the council of ministers, "It is true that we've lost everything. But at least we're rid of those who were such a nuisance to us. Then, drawing a deep breath: "For the Jat in me, this is a profoundly satisfying thought."

And everyone started laughing.

CHECK-LIST

*If the BJP returns: whom they will
appoint as governors*

■ **K. Padmanabhaiah:** The former home secretary who is now advisor to the Government of India, would have been sent as West Bengal governor, had the BJP not developed cold feet at the last moment. Padmanabhaiah is seen as an evenhanded, non-political bureaucrat, capable, competent and efficient. And ministers in the BJP will tell you how badly the party needs to establish its efficiency credentials.

■ **R.K.N. Chhibber:** His term as governor of Bihar is coming to an end but he may be given an extension because of his proximity to the Atal Dal.

■ **B.S. Chakravarti:** A man in search of a job, the former Rajasthan chief minister would be the perfect candidate for the governorship of a "sensitive" state like Bihar.

■ **Shankar Roy Choudhury:** The former army staff is the choice of Trinamool Congress because West Bengal hasn't seen any Dalit governor. Choudhury says, it is a matter of Dalit politics.

Breaking the ice?

Is there a new rapprochement in the offing between the Prime Minister and the President of India?

The PM was not asked for



Narayanan: relationship with Vajpayee is improving

any clarifications about his statements and his government's functioning when he met President K.R. Narayanan for a 45-minute meeting recently. However, he decided to provide clarifications anyway. He said that he had never told the BJP mouthpiece *Panchajanya*, that the President had been pressurised by the Opposition into taking decisions. What he'd actually told the President was that the President "was under pressure".

This broke the ice and both agreed that the media often misquotes and attributes things which they had never meant.

That the President suo moto, met the Prime Minister halfway. "It was not correct on the part of the Chief Election Commissioner to hold a meeting with me and in my very forecourt, hold a press conference, implying that the elections would be held in September rather than June. I had made no such suggestion to him. But he implied that I had," said Narayanan.

So now, the air is a little clearer.

HEARD IN NEW DELHI

The home minister doesn't appoint. He only dismisses.

A BUREAUCRAT ON THE BJP GOVERNMENT'S DECISION NOT TO APPOINT GOVERNORS

on the BJP government loyal and competent service. And he believes he's been the victim of a conspiracy which was hatched to get him out of the ministry.

He said as much at his farewell party at which L.K. Advani was an honoured guest. B.P. Singh began his farewell speech in conversational style. He said that although he had been a student of history and political science, he overlooked an important lesson: both the history and politics of Delhi are replete with evidence

Shrouded in mystery

Former home secretary B.P. Singh is a bitter man. He reckons he's giv-

BAROMETER

The Yadav sweepstakes: who's up, who's down



Mulayam Singh Yadav: Sold down the river by his own colleagues, the legendary Yadav strongman is now reduced to issuing four-page notes to explain his role in toppling the BJP government and causing elections. Rumours that he's done a deal with the BJP to keep the *videshis* out, hasn't helped his cause.



Muramdeo Narayan Yadav: The socialist from Bihar who joined the BJP to fight Laloo Yadav seems to be on his way up. If the BJP gives him a ticket, the chances are he will win.



Laloo Yadav: The proxy chief minister of Bihar is waiting to contest the elections and show he's still master of Bihar. He has been magnanimous to the Congress by declaring his support to Sonia Gandhi, proving himself a man of honour.



Ranjan Yadav: Once Laloo Yadav's right hand man, then in disgrace, and now rehabilitated, Ranjan Yadav's lips are zipped up and he's lying low. Deserting Laloo continues to be a possibility, though it remains to be seen if he has the courage to revolt.



Pappu Yadav: Once an MP, the former Bharatiya Party leader from Bihar has been dismissed and proclaimed an enemy of the state.

that Delhi is a "*chugalkhoron ka shahar*" (a city inhabited by those who carry tales). He said if he had remembered that he would never have been transferred.

Then he turned to the home minister's PS, Deepak Chopra and said: "You know better than anyone else, what a close relationship I had with the minister. No other home secretary has been so close to the minister."

Then L.K. Advani got up to speak. He lavished praise on Singh and said that if the home ministry had achieved anything in the past year, the credit was entirely due to the home secretary. Thus he clarified, indirectly, that he was entirely satisfied with the functioning of the home secretary.

So then why was Singh shifted? There are only theories, no real answers.

Black heart

Exactly what is the cause of the tension between Rajesh (Guddu) Pande and Kalyan Singh? The former is the main leader of the dissidents in UP and could bring the government down.

Apparently Kalyan Singh never really liked Rajesh Pande but didn't say so publicly. One day, when a whole lot of BJP leaders were sitting together and gossiping, one of them asked Pande why his hair had gone grey so early in life. "Why don't you do something about it? Use dye or something?" he suggested.

Kalyan Singh who was listening to this couldn't prevent himself. "His hair may be grey," he said about Pande, "but his heart is jet black."

Pande heard this gratuitous remark on himself and was most offended. The two haven't been talking since.

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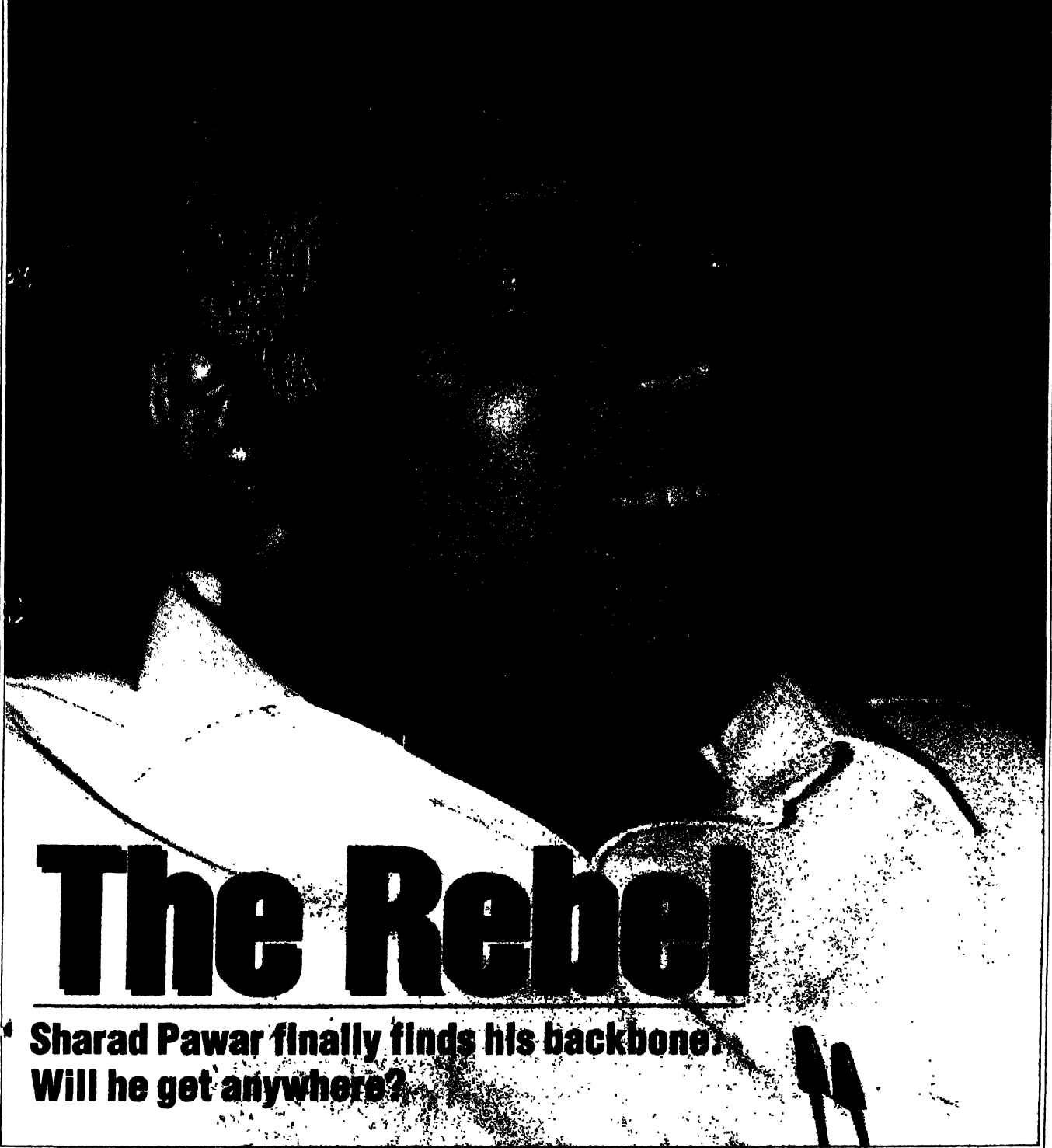
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PURULIA: A TWIST IN THE TRIAL

SUNDAY



The Rebel

**Sharad Pawar finally finds his backbone.
Will he get anywhere?**

AA



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Letters.....	4
Sight and Sound.....	6
Seen.....	7
Profile.....	26
Spotlight.....	34
News.....	59
Sunday Week.....	63
Business Diary.....	64
Random Notes.....	65
Delhi Diary.....	66



CULTURE PROFILE Double role

In *Paromitar Ekdin*, Aparna Sen performs both behind and in front of the camera..... 40

CONTROVERSY Digging up the past

Was Tipu Sultan a valiant patriot or a religious fanatic? Hindu fundamentalists question his credentials as a national hero..... 36

COLUMNS

MANI-TALK
Mani Shankar Aiyar..... 8

THE SOUTH BLOCK
Inder Malhotra..... 53

POWER PLAY
Rajiv Shukla..... 58

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COVER STORY 12

The rebel

Sharad Pawar finally finds his backbone. Will he get anywhere?

INTERVIEW 30

'Congress is the only answer'

Renuka Chowdhury on her political shift and more



SPECIAL REPORT 44

Twist in the trial

The prosecution is indicted for defrauding the court in the Purulia arms-drop case



Hype and hysteria

The World Cup seems to have become the new mantra of the Indians (*Fever pitch*, 16–22 May). Most companies in India have climbed on to the World Cup bandwagon in an effort to promote their products. People are drinking up gallons of soft drinks and munching their way through packets of biscuits just to get that elusive chance to go to England to watch the World Cup. Cricket now seems to be only a game that attracts

sponsors and big money.

World Cup '99 has put up an unprecedented feast of cricket and entertainment. Even the Lord's that has hosted generations of World Cup, is now ready with its futuristic media gallery to ensure that the cricket carnival reaches an audience of two billion living in over 120 countries. Whether the Indian team repeats its feat of 1983 or not is now secondary, what matters is that it will provide at least a pleasant diversion from the current political paths in the country.

Ipshita Dasgupta, Calcutta (West Bengal)

■ The cover story not only gave a definite guide to the World Cup but also provided some sidelights which made an interesting reading. With the World Cup finally having kicked off and with every team putting its best foot forward, it could be anybody's game. And with cricket sometimes being more a game of luck than expertise, teams that are fighting fit may lose out to

the more unlikely ones.

World Cup '99 is significant because cricketing greats like Curtly Ambrose, Allan Donald, Gary Kirsten, Arjuna Ranatunga, Md Azharuddin and Steve and Mark Waugh might be playing their last World Cup.

With the largest-ever prize fund of US \$1 million, the twelve participating teams will be going all-out for the kill before one of them finally brings the coveted Cup home.

Sarayu Nayar, Madras (Tamil Nadu)

Lacking maturity

This refers to the column headlined *Arun Shourie and his acolytes* (25 April–1 May). Instead of countering Shourie's write-ups in the *Asian Age* with facts and sound arguments, the columnist indulged in cheap jibes about Shourie's student days in St. Stephen's college. This is not the first time the columnist has resort-

ed to mud-slinging. Maybe he is jealous of Shourie's greater eminence and success.

Sorrowfully enough, the columnist lacks a sense of dignity and maturity.

M. Ratan, New Delhi

No room for complacency

The initial euphoria in the BJP camp that they could come to power again riding on the sympathy wave is slowly fading (*Preparing for the polls*, 9–15 May). The BJP couldn't afford to be complacent. They have not only to examine the ground realities but to work hard to remove hurdles.

The internecine feud in Uttar Pradesh unit of the BJP has to be resolved immediately before it goes out of hand. That the party work unitedly in the state is crucial in the coming general elections. The dissidence in its allies—Samata party and the Biju Janata Dal—are to be solved. So while keeping the allies together, they have to work out a common programme.

Raking up the issue of foreign origin of Sonia Gandhi won't help much.

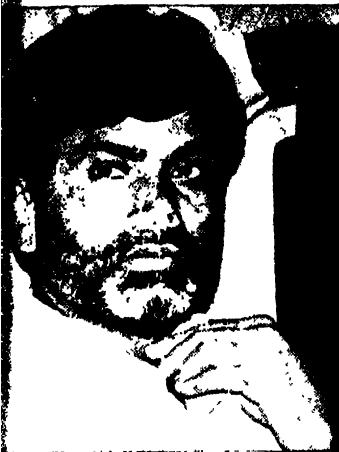
A. Jacob Sahayam, Thiruvananthapuram (Kerala)

Paying a heavy price

This refers to the article *Too much of a good thing* (9–15 May). The writer's prediction of an electoral rout for Chandrababu Naidu in the coming Assembly elections is not entirely without reason. In spite of his administrative dexterity and immense political guile, the anti-incumbency factor could still work against him and no matter how sincerely he has worked for the

India playing against South Africa at Hove: losing to the favourites





N. Chandrababu Naidu: the cyber CM

uplift of Andhra Pradesh, his chances of retaining his chief ministership may be slim.

Unfortunately, our electorate is yet to come of age and as long as it is not able to sift the chaff from the grain, the sorry state of affairs will remain. This is precisely why leaders like Laloo Prasad Yadav and Jayalalitha continue to rule the roost in the Indian political scene.

If the people of Andhra Pradesh do not recognise Naidu's worth, they may have to pay a heavy price. They must realise that not everyone is gifted with his kind of high-tech administrative ability and if the incumbent regime fails to honour his commitments (for which heavy foreign loans have been drawn), the laxity in administration could reduce AP to a state of abject penury.
Nallini Sudhakran, Trivandrum (Kerala)

President without precedent

This refers to the column headlined *In the dock* (2—8 May). K.R. Narayanan is the most controversial President of India. In fact, from day one, the President has been taking one or the

other controversial actions. The most notable one is the telecasting of his interview with an editor on the eve of the last Independence Day.

Among all the Presidents, Narayanan is the only person who is an IFS. And that he was nominated to this service by Jawaharlal Nehru on the advice of Harold Lasky of the London School of Economics 50 years ago. One can understand his debt to the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty. Probably Narayanan has repaid the same on this occasion.

V. Sagar, Delhi

Double trouble

This refers to the story *The guilty men (and women) of 1999* (2—8 May). The one man and the only woman, who undoubtedly deserve to be labelled thoroughly opportunist and dishonest are Subramanian Swamy and Jayalalitha. For, they in collusion with the Congress and CPI(M) had hatched the conspiracy to bring down a democratically-elected government. The nation has to go through another election now involving crores of rupees which could have been used for improv-

ing the quality of life of millions of our countrymen. The thinking Tamils must dump the duo in the coming elections.

Harkishen Singh Surjeet, who tried his best to be remembered as a kingmaker ended as a thoroughly discredited man, will probably keep his mouth shut. True,



Atal Behari Vajpayee: the best bet

the Bajrang Dal and such other motley outfits did try to create chaos in the country, but let's not forget that Vajpayee still remains our best bet. For, he alone can lead the country ahead. Certainly, we cannot leave the destiny of the nation to the Yadavs and Mayawatis.
Sobhitman Dahal, Guwahati (Assam)

SEPARATED AT BIRTH?

PRIZES 200 FOR CONTRIBUTORS



Prafulla Mahanta
Politician



Sandeep Shrivastava
Executive

Contributed by Tapas Sen, Calcutta (West Bengal)

■ The write-up lets one believe that if a woman is alone, she will admire herself in front of a mirror, if they are two, they will envy each other and if three, two will spread rumour about the third.

A.S. Raj, Bangalore (Karnataka)

Missing the point

One notes with regret that most trivial issues dominate the agenda in our Parliament and Assemblies and thus precious time wasted which could be well utilised in discussing and debating issues of national importance (*Small talk*, 11—17 April). Should one conclude from this that our elected representatives do not have the required intellectual capability to deliberate upon the most vital issues?

The level of discussion in Parliament is appalling as has been rightly pointed out by the columnist. We have handful of good speakers in our Parliament and they are also unable to make any substantial contribution because owing to the pandemonium they do not get a chance to put across their point of view.

We must elect enlightened, responsible and knowledgeable persons as our representatives. They should be able to represent us through their participation in debates rather than indulging in hooliganism. They should display exemplary self-discipline both inside and outside Parliament so that we can feel proud of them.

Onkar Chopra, New Delhi

In the *Spotlight* item titled *Celebrity tiff* (16—22 May), the picture of filmstar Feroz Khan was inadvertently carried instead of Feroz Khan, stage director. The error is regretted. —Editor

MILESTONES

DIED: Ramesh Tendulkar, 69, Marathi poet, scholar, critic and father of Sachin Tendulkar, of a heart attack on 19 May.

DIED: S. Swaminathan, 54, air vice-marshal, of a heart attack at the Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport shortly before checking in for a flight on 20 May.

KILLED: Abdul Ahad Kar, National Conference MLA, at Kupwara, north Kashmir. This is the first killing of a sitting MLA by militants in the state.

APPOINTED: M.K. Bezbaruah, former



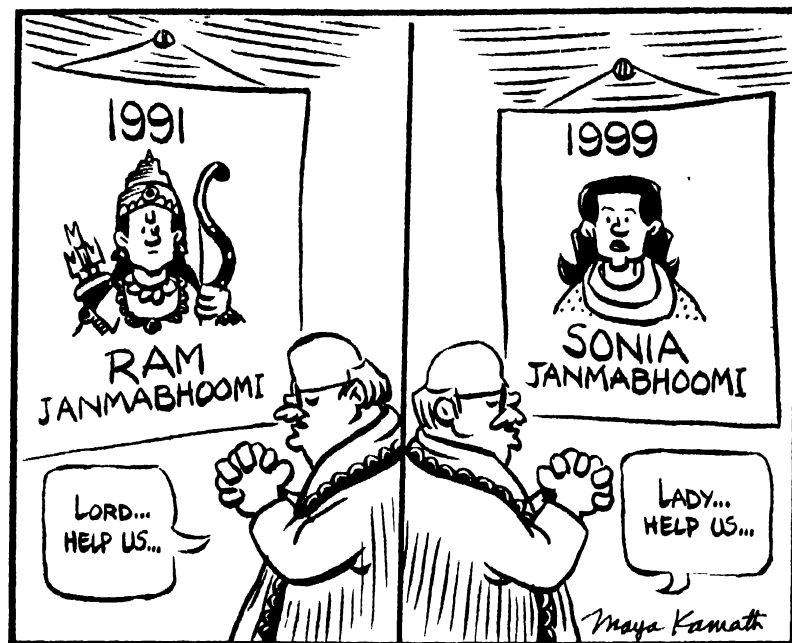
enforcement directorate chief, as member-secretary of the Tariff Commission.

APPOINTED: Shyamanand Jalan, thespian and director, as vice-chairman of the Sangeet Natak Akademi.

APPOINTED: Justice Sam Nariman Variava, a Bombay High Court judge, as Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court.

AWARDED: to Annada Shankar Ray, veteran litterateur, the Nazrul Award for promoting communal harmony and national integration through his works. The award carries a cash prize of Rs 25,000.

SIGHT & SOUND



MAYA KAMATH/THE ASIAN AGE

■ She is more Indian than Indians.

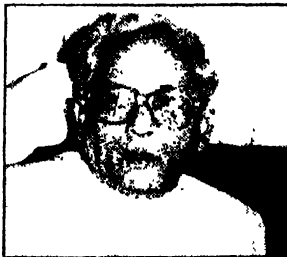
SIDDHARTHA SHANKAR RAY, former West Bengal chief minister, on Sonia Gandhi

■ Advani is a dangerous foreign hand. Sonia is a lesser danger as Italy is far away.

KANSHI RAM, BSP chief, alluding to the fact that the home minister was born in Pakistan

■ They asked me which beauty parlour I visit, where I shop. I told them I had never been to a beauty parlour, and I seldom went shopping.

RABRI DEVI, Bihar CM, to reporters after her interrogation by CBI officials



■ As Prime Minister, he can release any book or cassette, but I cannot share Rabindranath with a person who believes in Hindutva and who says RSS is his soul.

BUDDHADEB BHATTACHARJEE, West Bengal acting CM, explaining why he shunned the launch of Tagore's recordings on cassettes and CDs by Vajpayee in Calcutta on 20 May

■ It smacks of fascism and deserves denunciation from all those who hold democracy dear.

ATAL BEHARI VAJPAYEE, Prime Minister, on the Congress expulsions

■ My battle is now against the United States which has been trying to enslave the country; my heroes are Saddam Hussein and the people of Vietnam who have not compromised with the imperialist USA.

LALOO PRASAD YADAV, RJD chief, protesting against the opening up of the nation's economy to multinationals

■ I have been exploiting the talent God has given me. That is the magic behind my success.

ACHINT KAUR, television actress

SEEN

We are Madam's devotees

But while her partymen mourned, roadside vendors did good business



MASALA ANGUISH: the 'performers' at the Akbar Road site

The film: *Untitled* (can't make up their minds). The lead player: refuses to take the lead. Co-stars: just about everyone. Location: Akbar Road, on which the headquarters of the AICC (All India Congress Committee) are precariously perched, post Sonia Gandhi's resignation.

You have the makings of the year's biggest pot-boiler. And why not? It has all the ingredients to set the box office on fire: garish dance numbers, dialogues that could give Govinda an inferiority complex, villains (the Pawar-Sangma-Anwar trio) and the patriots (all Madam's devotees). For emotion-starved Indians, there's plenty of it oozing from every frame. The 'performers' at the Akbar Road location were masters in histrionics.

Manju Sachdeva was one such. Like a seasoned performer, she took a look at her audience and slowly poured kerosene over herself. Luckily for her, she managed to catch the eye of party workers and the policemen on duty. Finding an opportune moment, Sachdeva acted. She lit a match and, sure enough, a flood of saviours (as if on cue) surrounded her. Unfortunately, the ambulance which was kept ready in case of any eventuality acted as the spanner in the works and whisked her away to the nearest hospital. Sachdeva was saved, and one act of the drama was completed.

There was more to come. A Matador van arrived

with a makeshift roof, running up and down Akbar Road blaring the lyrics "*Tariq, Sangma aur Pawar, Congress ke teen gaddar*" and "*Nanga kar do beech bazar, Congress ke teen gaddar!*" Nothing great, but you never know it may hit the top brigade in a countdown show.

Suddenly there were fireworks (the real ones). Effigies of the trio were burnt while a 'smiling Sonia' cut-out looked on indulgently. A staccato burst of crackers followed. The Diwali mood, for you.

If there's a film show, can refreshments be far away? For the tired souls who were 'working' hard for over three days since Sonia Gandhi's resignation, there was enough food and water to keep them fighting fit. The NDMC was, for once, quick to maintain a continuous supply of drinking water. Then there were the roadside vendors selling *gol gappas*, *bhel puri*, *chana masala*, cucumbers and *kulfis*. For them, the roadshow on Akbar Road meant cool days during the hot Delhi summer, what with the brisk sales.

For film-starved Delhi-ites, the happenings at the AICC headquarters were the best treat for them. Visitors to the site walked away pleased, happy with what they got to see. Remarked one: "I think I shall vote for the Congress this time. You see, they can feel our pulse, they always give us the entertainment we want." •

Pallavi Ghosh/New Delhi

Suddenly there were fireworks. Effigies of the trio were burnt while a 'smiling Sonia' cut-out looked on indulgently

P.I.O.

Persons of Indian Origin or Persons of Italian Origin?



The BJP is so impressed with the patriotism of persons born in this country who abandon the nation of their birth to make their fortunes abroad, that they have introduced a special PIO card that gives Persons of Indian Origin privileges unavailable to anyone else. At the same time, the BJP is so doubtful about the patriotism of persons born elsewhere who abandon the privileges to which

they were born to take on the trials and tribulations of becoming a naturalised Indian citizen that Prime Minister Vajpayee has proclaimed his intention of amending the Constitution to violate the most important principle on which the Constitution is based: the prevention of discrimination among different classes of citizen.

What is worse, this exercise in constitutional revisionism is designed to stop just one person from beating him at the polls.

Until the danger arose of the BJP biting the dust at the feet of a Person of Italian Origin, it never occurred to the BJP that a country which has consistently — over 12 successive elections — rejected the BJP would embrace another political party without caring a fig where its leader was born. To nobble a political rival in a democratic election, Vajpayee now intends to amend the country's basic law. Fat chance that he will be able to do so. For one, his life as Prime Minister will end in October. For another, even if the Congress were to be worsted at

the polls, the BJP-led behemoth would never have the two-thirds majority required to amend the Constitution. His promise is, therefore, an empty threat. Neither he nor the bunch of vicious racists he heads has any chance of translating their apartheid into the law of this broad and tolerant land.

THE IRONY IS THAT in the very week this question has hogg-ed the headlines, the Hinduas have announced that they

intend to renounce their Indian citizenship to become loyal and obedient subjects of Her Majesty, the Queen of Buckingham Palace, aka the Defender of the (Protestant) Faith. Now, we all know the cosy relationship between Vajpayee and the Hinduas. And for those of us who did not know, Mohan Guruswamy has provided the salacious details of interventions by Vajpayee's PMO and PMH to compel the finance minister to indemnify the church-mouse poor Hinduas from paying penalties for non-performance at the Vizag fast-track power plant by forcing the multi-billionaire public sector Mahanadi Coalfields to promise to pick up the tab. The Hinduas, as PIOs, are apparently, in the eyes of Vajpayee, his son-in-law and fellow knickerwallahs, super-patriots while a Sonia Gandhi who sticks on to this country, at grave risk to her life and those of her children, after carrying her bullet-ridden mother-in-law's body to the Medical Institute and the bitter remains of her husband's mangled corpse to the *shamshan ghat*, is a person of doubtful national credentials.



A.B. VAJPAYEE: proclaimed his intention of amending the Constitution to violate the most important principle on which it is based — the prevention of discrimination among different classes of citizen

Doubtless it is the Hinduas' super-patriotism that accounts for Vajpayee dragging his feet in getting the Swiss to divulge the name of the owners of the Pitco account. It is the Congress that is crying for every scrap of paper on Bofors to be divulged, the BJP which is shying away from pressing for the last unrevealed account to be opened. In the eyes of Hindutva, collecting *hafu* from *mlechcha* gun manufacturers is no sin if you chuck up the land of your birth and stash your ill-gotten gains in foreign banks. Jai Shri Ram!

THIS IS ALSO THE same week in which an Indian is all set to become Prime Minister in Fiji, a country which, under the ousted incumbent, had earned itself the notoriety of conducting a racist coup to prevent an earlier Indian winner from taking power in the island-state merely because he belonged to a racial minority. India was so outraged that it broke diplomatic relations with Fiji in the early '80s. That same India is now, under the BJP dispensation, attempting to introduce discrimi-

One cannot expect the BJP to know anything of the Congress tradition because, after all, they egged on the madmen who killed the Mahatma. But Pawar and Co. should be reminded that the very first Head of State of Independent India (invited to be so by none less than Jawaharlal Nehru) was not only born outside India but was indubitably a non-Indian — Lord Mountbatten. Did Gandhiji object? Did Sardar Patel? The one man who did was the man to whom Advani bears the strongest resemblance — Mohammad Ali Jinnah



Jawaharlal Nehru



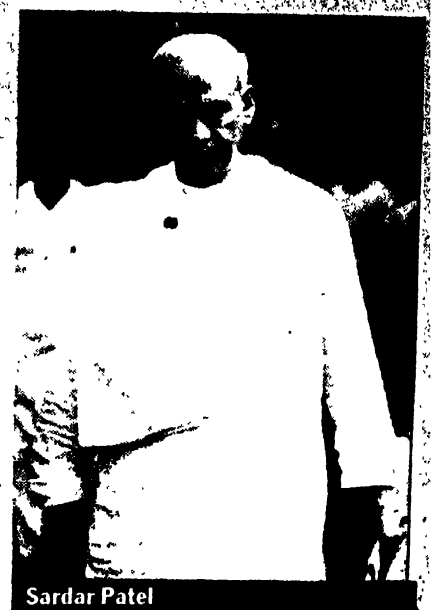
Mahatma Gandhi



Lord Mountbatten



Mohammad Ali Jinnah



Sardar Patel



Sonia Gandhi

natory racist principles into the Indian Constitution. Vajpayee must be stopped in his tracks.

The ironies do not end there. This is also the week in which the first Indian since India broke from British rule has assumed office as a minister in the British Cabinet. Keith Vaz was born in India, flaunts his continuing links with the country of his birth and is a frequent visitor to his friends and relatives in Goa. Would we not be outraged if it were to be suggested that the place of his birth or the colour of his skin or the composition of his genes should render him a second-class citizen as the BJP proposes to render Sonia Gandhi? And if the point is, as the BJP will boringly insist, that they are not objecting to a naturalised Indian becoming a minister, only Prime Minister, then I am left with little alternative but to draw attention to the hope expressed just last month by the leader of the Conservative Party, William Hague, that a Briton of Asian origin will become Prime Minister of the "green and pleasant land" in which his party colleague, Enoch Powell, once said "rivers of blood" would run if immigration from the non-white Commonwealth were not checked. I would also want to know whether the race supremacists of the BJP would object to Persons of non-Indian Origin becoming defence minister or foreign minister? Or even sports and youth affairs? At what point will their nonsense stop?

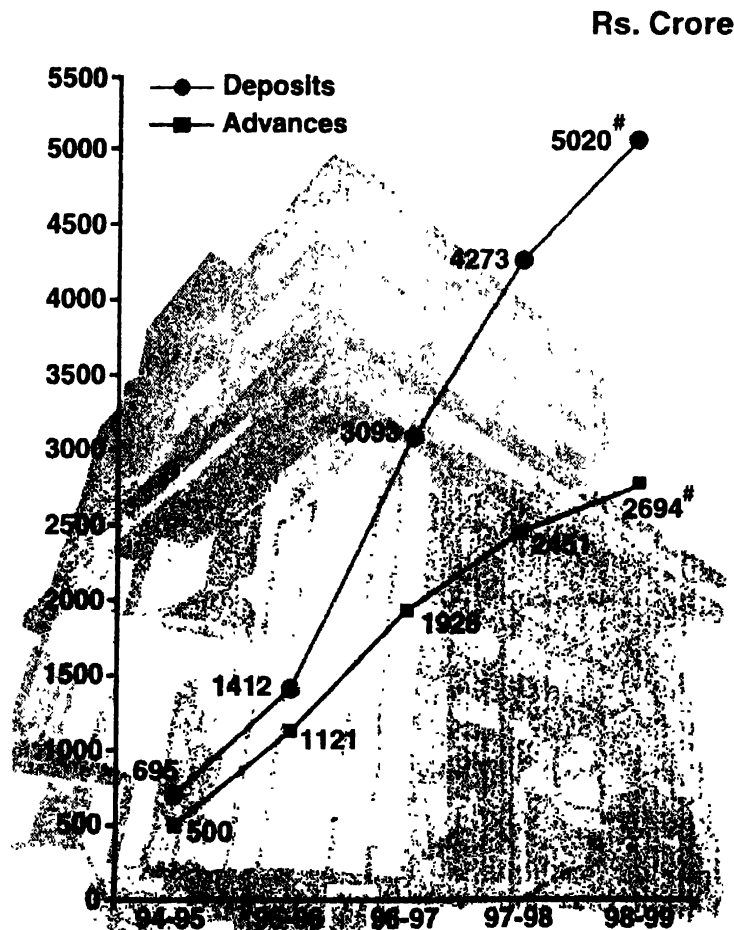
THE SUPREME IRONY IS that Pawar and Co. have stoked the BJP cause in the very week that the country, tired of politics, is fixated on the World Cup cricket matches in England. Glued as we are to watching the Indian team trekking its way back to the pavilion in the absence of Sachin Tendulkar, perhaps we have also noticed how Britons of Indian origin are quite shameless about betraying their country of adoption to root for their country of origin. This is also true of Britons of Pakistani origin, Bangladeshi origin, Sri Lankan origin, West Indian origin and African origin. Yet, we would all of us be scandalised if the "cricket test" be applied as the test of loyalty

Until the danger arose of the BJP biting the dust at the feet of a Person of Italian Origin, it never occurred to the BJP that a country which has consistently — over 12 successive elections — rejected the BJP would embrace another political party without caring a fig where its leader was born

in Britain. The British, who introduced us to racism, a concept with no place in India's tradition till the Brits came — and, therefore, the first principle of the utterly un-Hindu BJP — have adamantly refused to apply the "cricket loyalty test" in the very week that the BJP and its ex-Congress cohorts have been rushing to prove themselves the Rudyard Kiplings of the 21st century. Shameful!

One cannot expect the BJP to know anything of the Congress tradition because, after all, they egged on the madmen who killed the Mahatma, but Pawar and Co. should surely be reminded that the very first Head of State of Independent India was not only born outside India but was indubitably a non-Indian — Louis Lord Mountbatten, and that he was invited to become India's first independent Head of State by none less than Jawaharlal Nehru. Did anyone object — excluding, I mean, persons of the ilk of K.R. Malkani who was then just setting out to edit that skin of malice which goes by the name of *The Organiser*? Did Gandhiji object? Did Sardar Patel? The one man who did was the man to whom Advani bears the strongest resemblance — Mohammad Ali Jinnah. As I have always said, the BJP is the old All-India Muslim League dressed in saffron. •

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THE Rebel

Sharad Pawar finally finds his backbone. Will he get anywhere?

There's one thing about rebellion: it makes even Sharad Pawar articulate. After he had been expelled by the Congress, the Maratha held a press conference in Delhi. Flanked on either side by Tariq Anwar and P.A. Sangma, he fielded questions in a manner that was almost media-savvy. For one, he did not mumble as he usually does faced by an uncomfortable question. Instead, he smiled, and when in doubt turned to Sangma, asked him for a quick translation, and came back with a snappy answer.

He began the conference not by denouncing Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin, but by talking about his new party. He announced that it will be Sangma who would be drafting his party's constitution. And then added with a cheeky smile: "After all, he has had enough practice at it. Remember the Sangma Committee Report?"

Whether the press did or not, Sangma clearly did. He laughed uproariously and then took the mike. At first, he decided to play it cute. "I am in the process of drafting it, so I can't tell you the details now," he said mysteriously. And then beamed. However, when he realised that this wasn't winning him any friends, he quickly added: "Our constitution will be federal in nature; it will concentrate on empowerment of women and youth..."

Then, asked the press, why did he just 'disempower' one woman?

"Oh," said Sangma airily, "my concern is only for Indian women."

Later, Pawar was asked whether Sonia's resignation had made Sonia's foreign origin a non-issue. "Oh," he said with a smile, "wait for 24 hours."

Pawar was referring to the rumour that Sonia Gandhi would in all probability take back her resignation at the AICC session the next day (as things turned out, she withdrew her resignation that evening, and Pawar got another soundbite before the night was out when he called it 'a stage-managed show').





Tariq Anwar, P.A. Sangma and Sharad Pawar after they were expelled

The trio had raised the banner of revolt, they'd got their two minutes of fame but now what? For the Maratha, things were not so simple. Apart from persuading other Congressmen to join him, he had to work on possible allies from outside the Congress

THE Return

Sonia Gandhi withdraws her resignation

When Sharad Pawar was told that Sonia Gandhi had taken her resignation back, he laughed and said that this was part of a pre-ordained drama. "The entire show seems to have been stage-managed," he said.

Sonia had been warned about this kind of criticism. She was told by her friends that she had two choices before her. One: she could take back her resignation. After which there would be some amount of criticism. Her detractors would immediately launch a campaign against her, ridiculing the entire events of the last fortnight as part of a pre-ordained drama. So, if she was interested in keeping her image intact, she should not take back her resignation.

On the other hand, if she did not come back and take over as party president once again, the Congress would disintegrate. "I think the choice is clear," one of Sonia's non-political friends told her on the eve of the AICC session.

Earlier that morning, Sonia had called the ten Youth Congress workers who were on a hunger strike outside 10 Janpath. Dressed in a simple *salwar kameez* and slippers, she sat and chatted with them. "It was a very informal atmosphere," recalled one, adding: "It's the first time we have seen Soniaji so relaxed." However, their president had one request to make. She asked them to give up their hunger strike. When they refused, she smiled and said, "Don't worry, I won't let you down."

Then her political advisers got into the act. One of them even worked out the right scenario for the 'comeback'. According to the script, the working committee would meet the evening before the AICC session and draft a resolution asking her to withdraw her resignation. Oscar Fernandes would be sent over with the resolution and Sonia would say that she would like to 'sleep over it'.

This would be followed by Act Two. Accordingly, the AICC would meet and pass the resolution. After which, five CWC members would go across to 10 Janpath and bring Sonia back with them. Television crews were alerted and told that the 'comeback' would be around 1.30 pm.

It wasn't a bad script; it had potential for lots of psychopathic speeches and chest-beating; there was an element



Sonia's resignation was a spontaneous gesture. She had been hurt by her colleagues. It was an emotional reaction and not a well-orchestrated political move

of suspense (will she, won't she come back with the CWC members?); and lots of drama.

But it had one major flaw: Sonia Gandhi did not like it. Her resignation was a spontaneous gesture. She had been hurt by her colleagues. It was an emotional reaction — and not a well-orchestrated political move. In fact, her media advisers had been ringing up journalists requesting them not to use the word 'drama' while describing the events in the Congress.

Unfortunately for Sonia, this is exactly what her resignation had been reduced to: the half-hearted self-immolation bids, the wailing women and the various stalls outside 10 Janpath had reduced the entire event to a farce. In fact, it was not unlike a carnival where you could choose the stall according to the emotion you wanted to express. For instance, if you wanted to go on a hunger strike, there was a *shamiana*-topped stall which said 'bhok-hartal'. If you weren't that enthusiastic, and all that you wanted was to shout a slogan or two, you could go to the stall which proclaimed "Sonia lao, desh bachao". And if you wanted to please both Sonia and Bhupendra Hooda (the Haryana PCC chief), then you could go to the tent which had a banner with both Hooda's name and Sonia's.

No wonder she took one look at the script for her return — and cringed.

So when Fernandes went to her with the resolution drafted by the CWC at 8.15 pm on 24 May, she told him that there was no need for this to be put before the AICC. She would withdraw her resignation that evening itself.

The next day's headlines all concentrated on Sonia's return. Pawar's press conference in Delhi also got front-page coverage. But what was highlighted was not so much the question of Sonia's foreign origin as much as the fact that Pawar was silent on a possible tie-up with the BJP.

In other words, there was no mention of the issue that Pawar and his friends had raised; and because of which they had been expelled. It was back to business: to Sonia's return to the Congress and Pawar's future plans.

But after the lights faded and the television crews left for home, it was time for some serious thinking. The trio had raised the banner of revolt, they'd got their two minutes of fame but now what?

As far as the Congress was concerned, it was back to business. Sonia Gandhi had returned and the party had an election to prepare for. Party strategists were already trying to contain the damage that Pawar's ouster would cause in Maharashtra. The party general secretary, in charge of Maharashtra, had made one trip to Maharashtra and expelled 20 MLAs and 8 MLCs who had supported Pawar.

For the Maratha, things were not so simple. He had to start from scratch.

Pawar has a personal equation with both Mulayam Singh Yadav and Jayalalitha. While Arjun Singh ended up alienating Dr Subramanian Swamy, the Maratha has direct access to Jayalalitha and does not need to work through the likes of Swamy



Apart from persuading other Congressmen to join him, he also had to work on possible allies from outside the Congress. And then, he had to think of a name for the party ("It will have the word Congress in it"), a symbol, and, of course, the constitution.

In fact, the next day, while most Congressmen were at the Talkatora stadium attending the AICC session, Sangma sent a man across to the Congress headquarters to procure a copy of the party constitution. If all that they were planning to do was to copy the original, then why did they leave in the first place? Well, said Sangma, they didn't leave. They were expelled.

According to Pawar's friends, it was only last month that he first thought of quitting the party. "By now he knew that he would not get to be Prime Minister with Sonia in charge," said a Congressman from Maharashtra. "But it was

Laloo Prasad Yadav: Anwar is known to be close to him, but the former Bihar CM has his own compulsions — he needs the Congress to keep him out of jail

during the crisis in April, when he was sidelined totally by the party and the likes of Arjun Singh were asked to procure the numbers, that he felt totally sidelined. It was then that it dawned on him that let alone the No 1, he was not even the No 2 within the party."

In that Pawar was right to feel hurt. Unlike Singh, he has a personal equation with both Mulayam Singh Yadav and Jayalalitha. Singh ended up alienating Dr Subramanian Swamy, whereas the Maratha has direct access to Jayalalitha and does not need to work through the likes of Swamy.

And later, when Sonia appointed a media-coordination committee, Pawar was heard complaining, "What kind of a committee is this? Both the leaders of

George Fernandes

Has been in regular touch with Pawar and Mulayam Singh Yadav during the last month. In fact, during the Congress briefing, party spokesperson Ajit Jogi spoke about this nexus between the defence minister and Pawar. Fernandes was one of the first to target Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin

Mulayam Singh Yadav

During the last Lok Sabha polls, the Congress failed to tie up with the Samajwadi Party in UP. But Pawar managed a tie-up with Yadav in Maharashtra. And Yadav was one of the first to applaud Pawar's letter questioning Sonia's right to become PM. An alliance between the two could give the Congress sleepless nights in UP, since Salman Khurshid's secular credentials pale in comparison to Mulayam's.

Mamata Banerjee

The Trinamul leader has said that she is waiting for Pawar's phone call. She is yet to join the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA). While she has expressed her faith in Vajpayee, she has not shown the same enthusiasm for the BJP. Which is one reason why the PM rushed off to West Bengal to lay the foundation stone for an extension to the Calcutta Metro — something promised by Pramod Mahajan as part of the Bengal Package. Despite this, the



George Fernandes



Jayalalitha

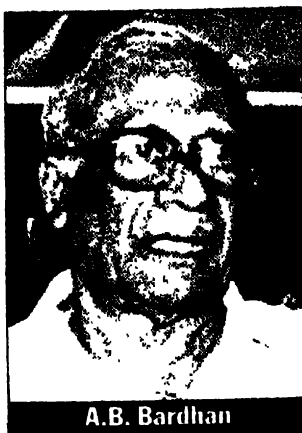
Pawar's FRIENDS



Mamata Banerjee



Mulayam Singh Yadav



A.B. Bardhan



Pramod Mahajan

lady has said that she will not join the NDA

A.B. Bardhan

The CPI has already welcomed Pawar's move to form an alternative front. Its general secretary, A.B. Bardhan has a personal equation with the Maratha: the two come from adjacent districts in Maharashtra. While Pawar is from Baramati, Bardhan was born and brought up in Nagpur. So, the 'federal' structure of Pawar's new party should go down well with the CPI

Pramod Mahajan

Ask Suresh Kalmadi and he will tell you all about the alliance between Pawar and Mahajan; and how he nearly lost his Rajya Sabha seat because 'those two' got together and 'conspired' against him. The two do have a personal rapport that could be firmed up in a strategic alliance. Although the BJP has ruled out an open alliance with Pawar (there were rumours that the BJP would dump the Shiv Sena and align with Pawar), no one is ruling out a seat-adjustment between the BJP and Pawar

Jayalalitha

Before he shot off his famous letter, Pawar had visited Madras to talk of poll alliances with Jayalalitha. Pawar came back to Delhi and told Sonia that he had a 'very good' meeting with Jayalalitha. Now, of course, Congressmen are not quite sure what Pawar discussed with the lady at Pooa Garden

Opposition (from the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha) are not in it."

Pawar was right in feeling sidelined.

- Unfortunately, this was not a vote-winning issue. He had to think of something else: something that would be of national importance and something that would endear him to those opposed to the Congress.

Which is why he raised the issue of Sonia's foreign origin. After all this is something his friends George Fernandes, Mulayam Singh Yadav and Pramod Mahajan had been harping about for so long.

- If Pawar can muster up a block of 50 MPs, then he will be heading the third largest party in the next Lok Sabha. In other words, whichever party gets to form the government — whether it is the Congress or the BJP — will need his support**

But while the 'letter' won him many friends outside the party, his own colleagues were slow to respond. A Pawar-loyalist, Gurudas Kamat was the first to go on television and denounce Pawar. In fact, Kamat even spoke to Pawar telling him that this was not an issue to be raised at all. "There are other things you could have discussed, but not this," he added.

Praful Patel, the MP from Bhandara has not been so vocal—at least on television. But he seems to be working his cellular overtime, if both Tariq Anwar and Murli Deora (a Pawar-baiter) are to be believed. Each claims to have received reassuring phone calls from Patel. While Patel is still to come out of the closet, most expect him to throw in his lot with Pawar.

However, another Pawar-loyalist P.C. Chacko went to 10 Janpath and assured Sonia of his support. The Congress president was visibly moved. She told him that what upset her was not so much as the fact that Pawar had questioned her foreign birth as that he had called her a national security risk. This, after she had been living in a Prime Minister's house for so many years!



Later when Sangma was asked to elaborate on this aspect of the letter, he brushed the question aside by saying that he would go into it at the 'appropriate time'.

Pawar has said that he will be launching his party at a convention in Bombay on 10 June. In the meantime, Congress strategists are trying to assess his damage potential. Most concede that Pawar will not win more than 10 to 12 seats in Maharashtra. But he could, however, wreck as many as 26 seats for the Congress by splitting the secular vote. In fact, while it is unlikely that Pawar will go in for an open-alliance with the BJP and the Shiv Sena in the state, he will, however, have some sort of a seat adjustments with them.

It is hard to see Pawar's ouster having a direct impact on any other state. True, a tie-up with Mulayam could harm the Congress in UP (especially if the Congress fails to align with the BSP) and in Tamil Nadu (if he manages to wean away Jayalalitha from the Congress). But it is hard to see any other state visibly affected, except to the extent that all the Congressmen who will be denied a ticket to contest the polls will join up with Pawar.

As far as the north-east is concerned, the entire sector sends as little as 25 MPs to the Lok Sabha, and Sangma's own state Meghalaya sends only two. This has not stopped the Congress from pressing the panic button. In fact, Ambika Soni, the general secretary in charge



SONIA GANDHI

Singh's favourite song



ARJUN SINGH

Does Sonia need enemies when she has Arjun Singh on her side?

Perhaps no issue in recent Indian politics has been as misused as Rajiv Gandhi's assassination. While some of the blame attaches to Narasimha Rao, S.B. Chavan, Subramanian Swamy and their sabotage of the Jain Commission, the one person who has turned the Gandhi's family security into a personal cottage industry is Arjun Singh (see Check-List at the back of this issue).

There he was again last week on every television station regurgitating the tired old cliches of another era: diabolical conspiracy...fascist clique...plot to kill...etc. Even as the Congress broke in Maharashtra and its standing seemed in grave danger of collapse, nothing could deter Arjun Singh from the old Pavlovian response: when in doubt, talk about an assassination.

The tragedy in all this is that we still don't know the truth about Rajiv's assassination. And only a fool would deny that Sonia's life is in danger. But so low is Arjun Singh's credibility that each time he raises the issue, he robs it of all meaning and sense. He used the Jain Commission to try and split the party when his personal fortunes were suffering under Narasimha Rao, and then he used Justice Jain's interim report to topple the Inder Gujral government and force Sonia into politics.

Now, Singh's position is under threat once again. It is no exaggeration to say that he is the single most hated person in the Congress party. It was he (along with M.L. Fotedar) who master-minded the abortive coup against the Vajpayee government. By assuring Sonia Gandhi that she had widespread support within the Third Front, he pushed her into virtually declaring that she was a candidate for Prime Minister — and, as is now obvious, all her current problems stem from that declaration.

What galls Congressmen is that Singh is unelectable. He has lost twice — by huge margins — in the last two Lok Sabha elections despite changing constituencies. He is a zero in Madhya Pradesh politics and both his key proteges — Digvijay Singh and Kamal Nath — have not only outclassed him but have also disowned their Arjun connections.

When Sharad Pawar asks how people who cannot win Lok Sabha elections end up being principal advisers to Sonia Gandhi, he strikes a chord with Congressmen who immediately think of Arjun Singh. Stories to the effect that Sonia began to distance herself from Singh after the fiasco of the abortive coup are simply not believed. And Singh ensures that he remains visible. When all else fails, he claims Sonia's life is in danger knowing that no Congressman can afford to contradict him on that issue.

Why does Sonia Gandhi depend on a man who can't win a municipal election, who is so well-hated in the party and who has done so much damage to her reputation?

If we knew the answer to that, then perhaps the Congress wouldn't be in this mess today.

Why does Sonia Gandhi depend on a man who can't win a municipal election, who is so well-hated in the party and who has done so much damage to her reputation?

spent 20 minutes at the party's regular press briefing reacting to reports that Sangma's ouster had created a vertical split in the Meghalaya Congress. After which she read out a long list of those who were still loyal to Sonia. A hysterical over-reaction surely!

As for the third rebel, Tariq Anwar, he is known to be close to Laloo Yadav. But the former Bihar chief minister has his own compulsions — he needs the Congress to keep him out of jail. But Anwar has kept the channel of communications open.

So as far as the numbers are concerned, it is still too early to ascertain Pawar's worth. As of now, it is not clear how he hopes to achieve his intended target of 50 Lok Sabha seats. For that is Pawar's gameplan: if he can muster up a block of 50 MPs, then he will be heading the third largest party in the next Lok Sabha. In other words, whichever party gets to form the government — whether it is the Congress or the BJP — will need his support. Which is why he did not rule out an alliance with the BJP at the press conference in Delhi. Only, he was not talking of a pre-poll alliance as much as a post-poll deal.

And in all probability Pawar will have no problem offering support to the Congress if it emerges as the single largest party in the next elections — even if that would mean supporting a 'person with foreign origin' as the Prime Minister. (At that time, Pawar will say that he was bowing to the mandate of the people.)

In any event, Pawar's grouse was not so much with Sonia Gandhi as it was with the coterie that surrounds her. For he had no problems with Sonia's Italian birth when he proposed her name as the party president last March or even as the Congress prime ministerial candidate in April this year. It is because he was made to kow-tow to the likes of Arjun Singh and M.L. Fotedar that Pawar decided to quit the party. And made Sonia's foreign origin the issue.

This is something that most Congress workers have realised. Congressmen from Uttar Pradesh who were camping outside 10 Janpath last week shouted more slogans against Fotedar and Singh, than they did against Pawar, Sangma and Anwar. Similarly, when Nagaland chief minister S.C. Jamir moved the resolution at the AICC session, asking Sonia to take over as party president once



again, he also warned her against the coterie.

The day Pawar sent off his letter, it was a very gleeful Arjun Singh who

Pawar's grouse was not so much with Sonia as it was with the coterie that surrounds her. For, he had no problems with Sonia's Italian birth when he proposed her name as the party president last March or even as the Congress prime ministerial candidate in April this year

S.C. Jamir: when the Nagaland CM moved the resolution at the AICC session, asking Sonia to take over as party president once again, he also warned her against the coterie

rung up CWC members and campaigned for his expulsion. But, if Sonia has learnt something from the events of the last fortnight, she will keep Singh at a safe distance.

But the damage has been done. Three working committee members have left the Congress — which is two more than Singh could muster when he split to form the Congress (T) in 1995. An ambitious Sharad Pawar says that he will form the *real* Congress that will be not unlike Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi's Congress. But for that he has to compete with a Congress headed by a member of the Nehru-Gandhi family!

Not an easy task. But now that Sharad Pawar has finally found his backbone, he says he can do it. •

Priya Sahgal/New Delhi

DIVERSE DECISIONS

Searching for a pattern in Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh

Every number matters. The Bharatiya Janata Party learnt this the bitter way during the confidence vote. But other parties cannot afford to be complacent either. As a result, each seat is going to count and in the forthcoming election, states with even few seats cannot be ignored by the leaders while drawing up strategies.

On account of its size and political diversity, India is a difficult country to divide into regions. There is also no clear yardstick for categorisation. Though Haryana, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh are geographically in the north, politically they have little in common with the other northern states. While Haryana and Punjab have been carved out of a single state, the two are different electorally. Likewise though Madhya Pradesh in central India has greater similarities with the northern states. But at the end of the day, the four states do matter as they have a combined strength of 67 Lok Sabha seats.

Madhya Pradesh

Basic facts

Geographically the largest state in the country, MP is politically and culturally diverse. Home to the largest tribal population, it has nine seats reserved for the Scheduled Tribes.

In recent years, the electoral contest has been restricted mainly to two parties: the Congress and the BJP. The Bahujan Samaj Party has emerged as a significant force in certain areas and is now a determining factor.

One of the states to witness the emergence of the SVD government in the late Sixties, MP has looked at other electoral options besides the Congress. This,

however, in recent years has got restricted to the BJP following the marginalisation of the Janata Dal since the late Eighties.

The 1998 election

✚ Anti-incumbency factor helped the BJP to win 30 of the 40 seats.

✚ The Congress's improvement in its vote share from 30.9 to 39.16 per cent was not reflected in its tally of seats.

✚ The Congress's inability to improve upon its 1996 tally of eight seats was partly due to the increase in the BJP's vote share from 41.32 to 45.77 per cent and the resultant reduction in the votes of other parties like the JD and Madhya Pradesh Vikas Congress.

✚ Though the BSP raised its vote share from 6.73 to 8.71 per cent, it failed to retain the two seats it had won in 1996



Uma Bharati: saffron Mandalisation



and also to make any dents in new constituencies.

The 1999 election

✚ This election will be greatly determined by the ability of chief minister Digvijay Singh to nullify the anti-incumbency factor in the Assembly elections in November 1998.

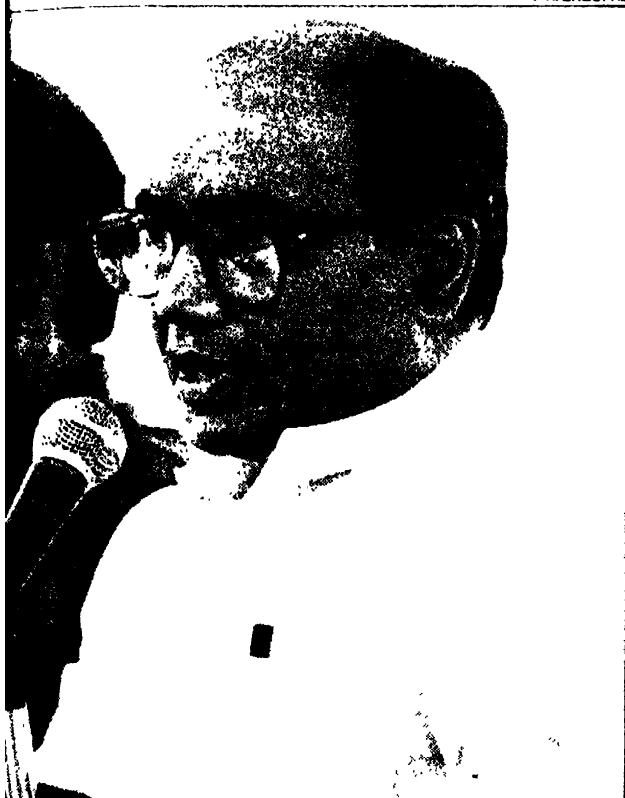
✚ The BJP has not been able to resolve problems in its state unit that remains divided between the old-timers led by party president Kushabhau Thakre and the new leadership.

✚ Mandalisation in several parts of the state is almost complete and the choice of candidate will determine the outcome in many cases.

✚ The BJP will be hard pressed to repeat its 1998 performance especially since the Congress government has earned the people's goodwill. However, the party is unlikely to slip to the level of last November.

✚ The BSP, which is decisive in as many as 13 seats, is likely to hold the key.

V. RAJAGOPAL



This election in MP will be greatly determined by the ability of chief minister Digvijay Singh to nullify the anti-incumbency factor in the Assembly elections in November 1998

Madhya Bharat

The region is most affected by Mandalisation. Backward castes play a dominant role with the Kurmis and Lodhs being prominent. No party can afford to ignore caste affiliations of the candidates. This is also the region where the BJP has spent considerable time in 'social engineering'.

Among the seats in the region, Guna, adjacent to Gwalior, promises a key contest despite being represented by Vijayaraje Scindia of the BJP since 1989. The chances that she might not contest this time on account of failing health and that the BJP might 'transfer' the seat to her daughter Yashodhara or field a 'non-royal' candidate make it a noteworthy contest.

However, even in the last election, Scindia won with a reduced margin compared to her past showing. From a whopping 60 per cent in 1989, her share fell to 46.67. Though her margin was over one lakh, the shine was taken away by the fact that the BSP candidate polled more than 1.17 lakh votes. In 1998, the combined votes of the Congress and the BSP were more than the BJP's. If the two parties are able to forge an alliance, the BJP

is likely to find the seat tough to retain.

Besides Rewa and Satna — the two seats bagged by the BSP in 1996 — the other high-profile constituency is Khajuraho, if only for being the political home of fiery BJP leader Uma Bharati. One of the symbols of the Mandalisation of the BJP, the seat has been won by Bharati on four occasions since 1989. In the last election, she won by more than 96,000 votes.



RUPINDER SHARMA

Sumitra Mahajan: a decade of success?

But, what is worrying the BJP camp is its declining vote share since 1989 when Bharati polled more than twice the Congress's votes. Also worrying the party is the rapid rise of the BSP. In 1998, the BSP polled 14.37 per cent, up from nine per cent in 1996.

In fact, the combined votes of the Congress and BSP last time was a shade more than Bharati's. The electoral behaviour of the Scheduled Castes (20.5 per cent of the electorate) and the Kurmis would be the key to the contest.

Chhattisgarh

The demand for statehood has dominated politics in the region for more than two decades. The BJP has had a head start over the Congress on account of vocal support for the demand. However, the Congress has not made any attempt towards the creation of a separate state, as the party needs the numbers in the Assembly. The BJP will make the most of the situation.

The political capital of the region is Raipur, once a pocket borough of the Shukla clan. Over the years however, the BJP has built on the steady base of the Jana Sangh. In the past ten years, it has lost the seat only once in 1991 and the sitting MP, Ramesh Bains, has built a formidable base. Though the Shukla clan has lost its pre-eminent position, it is not yet ready to hand over the constituency to any other leader in the Congress.

Rajnandgaon is the other seat that might witness a no-holds-barred contest with veteran Congress leader Motilal Vora making an all-out attempt to retain the seat he won last time by a margin of over 48,000 votes. The losing candidate in 1998 was Ashok Sharma, who wrested the seat from the Congress in 1996. If the BJP repeats the candidate, Vora will have a tough contest on hand as the constituency has rarely re-elected its MP.

Malwa

The most notable aspect of the region is its bipolar character. Even in the initial years, the contest was primarily between the Congress and the Jana Sangh. After the BJP's formation, the support shifted to it and in recent years whatever base the Janata Dal had built shifted to the BJP. With no third force to split the votes, this is one BJP citadel that the Congress will find tough to breach.



Om Prakash Chautala: back in the reckoning

Indore is a crucial seat, if only for the presence of BJP general secretary Sumitra Mahajan. An MP since 1989, Mahajan is among the few BJP leaders who have been able to retain the seat as well as a high vote share. Since defeating former chief minister P.C. Sethi in 1989, Mahajan has polled more than 50 per cent of the votes and in 1998 bagged 52 per cent — up from 50.9 per cent in 1996.

Ujjain is another seat featuring a BJP stalwart: Union minister Satya Narain Jatia. Here the BJP polled upward of 50 per cent of the votes since 1989. In 1998, Jatia polled 56.07 per cent to better his 1991 mark of 54.4.

Mahakoshal

The region is yet to become bipolar. The JD and even the BSP have their respective areas of influence. Jabalpur and Chhindwara are the key seats, the former being the main urban centre and the latter being the pocket borough of Congress leader Kamal Nath.

Chhindwara has been a Congress bastion that the Opposition could not dent even in 1977. It went to the BJP for the first time in 1997 when former chief minister Sunderlal Patwa defeated Kamal Nath after his wife vacated the seat for him following his acquittal in the *hawala* case.

Jabalpur has vacillated between the Congress and the BJP since 1989 and the contest becomes more interesting owing to the presence of the JD and the BSP. The two parties polled a total of 16

per cent last time and were instrumental in the victory of the BJP.

Haryana

Basic facts

The 1998 election

☛ The Haryana Vikas party-BJP alliance was virtually routed and the partners won only one seat each against the combined total of seven in 1996.

☛ The woes of the ruling coalition were on account of a good performance of the Haryana Lok Dal of the Devi Lal clan and its alliance with the BSP.

☛ Though the BJP more or less managed to retain its vote share, the HVP suffered erosion of a decisive four per cent.



Virbhadra Singh: willing his wife to win

The 1999 election

☛ The outcome will depend on the alliance that the BJP opts for.

☛ By all accounts the Indian National Lok Dal of Om Prakash Chautala is on its way back with the BJP retaining its base.

Ambala

Ambala is among the significant seats that went to the BSP last time because of its alliance with the HLD. The BJP candidate was former Lok Sabha deputy speaker Suraj Bhan. The party is expected to mount a serious campaign to regain the seat.

In 1998, the BJP lost by a mere 3,000-odd votes. What complicates the contest is the significant presence of the Congress that turns the contest triangular. In 1996, this benefited the BJP and it nearly did so again last time.

Rohtak

Rohtak is another seat to watch especially as it saw one of the keenest contests last time when Devi Lal lost narrowly by 383 votes to Congress candidate Bhupinder Singh.

Swami Indervesh — an Arya Samaj leader who shot into fame in the Seventies — joined the BJP a few weeks before the 1998 polls and was fielded from this constituency. He, however, came a distant third.

Punjab

Basic facts

The 1998 election

☛ The dream alliance of the BJP-Akali Dal continued to hold sway over the state, winning 11 of the 13 seats. Of the other two, one was bagged by I.K. Gujral and the other, Phillaur, was won by Satnam Singh Kaithi, a rebel BSP candidate propped up by the ruling coalition.

☛ The Congress's vote share dipped by nearly ten per cent to an all-time low of 26.85.

☛ The BSP lost out on seats — it won

three in 1996 — but increased its share of votes to 12.88 per cent, up from 8.96 in 1996.

The 1999 election

✱ The polls this time come close on the heels of the split in the Akali Dal and the electoral base of Gurcharan Singh Tohra is yet unknown. The BJP has made its loyalty to the Badal faction known and there is little chance of the alliance getting grounded.

✱ The Congress is yet to show signs of regaining lost ground.

Gurdaspur

It should provide an interesting contest if the BJP decides to field actor Vinod Khanna again. Last time, he defeated Congress heavyweight Sukhbans Kaur by a margin of more than one lakh. This is the seat that the Congress has the best chance of bagging if there is any slackness in the BJP campaign.

Phillaur

Another tricky seat due to the BSP's presence. Along with Hoshiarpur and Ropar, the BSP is the main contender against the BJP-Akali combine and in Phillaur the BSP candidate was defeated by Kaith, who contested the polls after being denied a party ticket. It remains to be seen what future Kaith chalks out for himself.

Himachal Pradesh

Basic facts

The 1998 election

✱ The BJP had reasons to smile as it won three out of the four seats barring the Congress bastion of Shimla.

✱ The BJP also crossed the 50-per cent mark for the first time by bagging 51.43 per cent of the votes.

✱ The Congress's vote share went down by 13 per cent to an all-time low of 41.90 per cent.



Gurdaspur should provide an interesting contest if the BJP decides to field actor Vinod Khanna again. But the Congress might bag the seat if there is any slackness in the BJP campaign

The 1999 election

✱ Despite fears to the contrary, the BJP-HVC understanding has had a smooth run so far.

✱ The BJP shall have to ward off the anti-incumbency factor against its government.

Mandi

A keen contest appears to be on the cards

in this constituency, once represented by former Union minister Sukh Ram. In the last election, however, he was humiliated and polled only 8,000-odd votes. BJP's Maheshwar Singh bagged the seat defeating Pratibha Singh, the wife of former chief minister Virbhadr Singh. If the Congress repeats its candidate, the campaign will hot up, as Singh will leave no stone unturned to have his wife elected in the second attempt. •

Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay/Bhopal, Chandigarh and Shimla

Begum Akbar Jahan's diatribe against her chief minister son Farooq Abdullah may be a ploy to make way for her grandson as the political successor

Begum Akbar Jahan, mother of Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Farooq Abdullah, has lived a long political life. Yet, she is least known for making political statements. She was actively involved in the battle against the despotic Dogra raj in the late 1940s, led by her late husband, Shaikh Mohammad Abdullah. The strength and courage she showed in that war, earned her the sobriquet 'mather-e-Mehrban' (kind mother). She was also member of Parliament twice. But her entire political career has been shorn of controversies.



Begum Akbar Jahan: "Omer will prove himself the real ideological successor of Shaikh Abdullah"



Shaikh Abdullah: never lost contact with the masses

But the month of May '99 changed all that. At an age when she is deemed too old to have any political stake, she has made a startling statement. And that too against her chief minister son. Here is how it goes.

"Towards the end of my life, I am a disappointed person. I am not satisfied. I don't have peace of mind. My heart weeps as killings have become the order of the day. I feel sad for my people who are more dear to me than my sons, daughters and the family," said the

Begum in an interview to a national daily. She has unequivocally castigated the government led by her son as a corrupt one. "I have already told Farooq if things continue like this I will jump into politics to get people out of this quagmire. And I tell you my age will not be a hurdle," she said.

On the face of it, Begum Jahan's comments on the state of Kashmir have sprung from her love for her people. It is also being seen as a 'tough' mother's frank admonition of her son's 'inept' government. Surprisingly, her observa-

tions have failed to elicit sharp reactions — both in the political circles and among the public. The ruling National Conference, the butt of her ire, has responded with a lukewarm reaction. Without making a direct reference to her, Shaikh Nazir Ahmad, a family veteran and party general secretary, said, "Those who call our government corrupt, should come out with proof." Farooq Abdullah, himself, has described her mother's remarks as 'unfortunate'. Others tend to ignore it as it is 'all in the family'.



Omer with Farooq Abdullah: the father has started describing himself as 'old'

Keen political observers believe that the Begum's comments were careful and calculated, aimed at gauging the mood of the people. They maintain that Begum Jahan knew that Farooq Abdullah's government had little credibility among the people and wanted to gain political mileage out of criticising it. "By lashing out at it [the Farooq government], she wanted to win their [the peoples'] favour and then impose Omer on them," said A.U. Mir, a lawyer.

Congress legislature party leader Mahbooba Mufti expressed similar views. She told SUNDAY that Begum Jahan's criticism of the Farooq government lacked conviction. "It is just to hood-wink people into accepting another leader from the family," she said.

But can Omer prove a better and capable heir apparent of his family's political legacy? The popular feeling in Srinagar is that he cannot. Omer, for all practical purposes, does not belong among Kashmiris. His mother is English, his wife isn't a Kashmiri. One of his sisters is married to a non-Kashmiri and two others would like to find a match for themselves outside Kashmir. Moreover, Omer does not even know or speak Kashmiri language. His plunge into politics last year when he became member of Parliament, did not help him to come closer to the people. "He did not speak even once of the problems and the plight of Kashmiri people in Parliament. Nor has he ever visited his people in his constituency," maintains Mahbooba Mufti, CLP leader and daughter of former Union home minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed.

A great tribute paid to Shaikh Mohammad Abudullah's political leadership is that he always identified himself with people and never lost contact with them. Even Begum Akbar Jahan admits that fact. "Shaikh Sahab was the outcome of a struggle for the honour and dignity of the Kashmiris. Farooq got it on a platter; he did not have to do anything to be there at the top," she said.

But, at the moment, Farooq Abdullah is at the lowest ebb of his popularity and has precious little to offer his son by way of political legacy. Despite the heavy-duty campaign launched in his favour by his grandmother, Omer will have to convince his electorate of his involvement in the state's affairs if he wants to make a place for himself in its political firmament. •

Rashid Ahmad/Srinagar

The real surprise is the common man's total disregard for what the Begum has said. Now that every man living in Kashmir Valley is all too familiar with 'corruption', 'misuse of power and politics', 'abuse of human and political rights' and other related slogans, it was expected that Begum Jahan's comments would perhaps unleash the pent-up anger. But that did not happen. In fact, many of them smelled a rat in her protestations when she suggested her grandson, Omer Abdullah, as an alternative leader who would deliver the people out of the mess. "I have a lot of hope in my grandson, Omer, whom I am grooming in politics," she said. "I am sure he will prove himself and be the real ideological successor of Shaikh Mohammad Abdullah." "This sufficiently purports that Begum Saheba is desperate to see her family's third generation imposed on Kashmiri people during her lifetime," said M.S. Khan, an academician. A lot of people in the state share his view.

The apprehensions are not quite unfounded. For the past few months, there is a buzz in the Valley's political circles that the first family would call

back Omer Abdullah to local politics. Significantly, such murmur gains currency at a time when Farooq Abdullah has started describing himself as 'old now'. It is quite in the same manner that power was handed down to Farooq Abdullah from his father Shaikh Mohammad Abdullah. Farooq first became a member of Lok Sabha in 1980. After a year he was called back from Parliament to participate in local politics and was inducted as a minister in Shaikh Mohammad Abdullah's government. He was then put in charge of the party and made president of the National Conference.

Omer, for his part, has already completed his assignment as MP. He is also heading the party's youth wing. Knowledgeable sources in the ruling National Conference insist that the party would like to field some other suitable candidate in the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections instead of Omer. If these sources are to be believed, Omer would be inducted in the state Cabinet some time before parliamentary elections to gain practice in local political affairs, before being given the charge of office, as also of the party.

CHEERS!

The fun-loving Sangma gets serious

Nobody was very surprised when Sharad Pawar raised the banner of revolt. After all, most Congressmen find Pawar pretty revolting anyway and it wasn't hard to see what his motives were. Even Tariq Anwar had nothing to lose. As Sitaram Kesri's alter ego, he had longed to become India's second-most powerful man once Kesri became Prime Minister. Sadly, Kesri is history now and poor Tariq counts for nothing. At least a revolt brings him back to the headlines.

But, Purno Sangma?

Wasn't it Sangma who everybody said was emerging as Sonia Gandhi's newest lieutenant? Wasn't it Sangma who conducted an investigation into the party's defeat in the last election at the behest of the new Congress president? And wasn't it Sangma, who people said, was the new face of the Congress?

So why on earth was Sangma part of the Pawar revolt? Why was he playing Laurel to Pawar's Hardy? Or on second thought, why was he playing Hardy to Pawar's Hardy?

There are many theories and innumerable explanations but the truth is that nobody really knows. When Sangma started the discussion at the CWC meeting on 15 May, most people groaned inwardly. It was R.K. Dhawan who first raised the subject of Sonia's origins. Dhawan intended to rally the CWC on the issue. Much to his horror, Sangma interrupted, "I have to say I agree with the BJP on this. It is a very important issue and we must discuss it."

Even then, few people recognised that this was the beginning of a revolt. Some even whispered, "Oh my God, Purno has started drinking in the morning also. We thought that it was restricted to the evenings." Nobody believed that Sangma had decided to challenge

Sonia's leadership. When Sharad Pawar, Tariq Anwar and Rajesh Pilot joined in, then the penny dropped. Perhaps a revolt was under way. But what was Sangma doing in such company?

As it turned out, it was Pilot who disassociated himself from the company. Sangma emerged as a key conspirator. That evening, he signed his name to a letter that some English-speaking person had drafted for Sharad Pawar and despatched 22 copies to Working Committee members. He also sent off xeroxes to key journalists.

The next day, Sonia asked the Working Committee to discuss the letter as

Yes, he does epitomise the laid-back, fun-loving, high-living, hard-drinking, hawai-chappal wearing, north-eastern male. But his politics must be kept separate from his lifestyle

Sangma, Pawar and Tariq had demanded. A meeting was called for the 17th of May. Oscar Fernandes was assigned the job of contacting the letter-writers. Sharad Pawar said that he had a meeting with the Governor in Pune on that day. No problem, said Fernandes, they would meet in the evening to give Pawar enough time to get back. Next, Fernandes called up Sangma at 11.30 pm. He had heard that Sangma was leaving for America at 4.30 am. Could he possibly postpone his departure by 24 hours?

No problem, said Sangma. I'll be there for the meeting.

Three hours later, he packed his bags, left his house, drove to the airport and hotfooted it out of India.

The big question: why has he done it?

Nobody is convinced by his explanation that he is worried about nationality. Once you start playing the 'who is really an Indian' game, Sangma is on a weak wicket. In most of the cow belt and in all of South Asia, the majority of voters would have difficulty believing that Sangma is Indian. It isn't just that he's a Christian or that he looks Chinese, it is also that he is unintelligible in both English and Hindi.

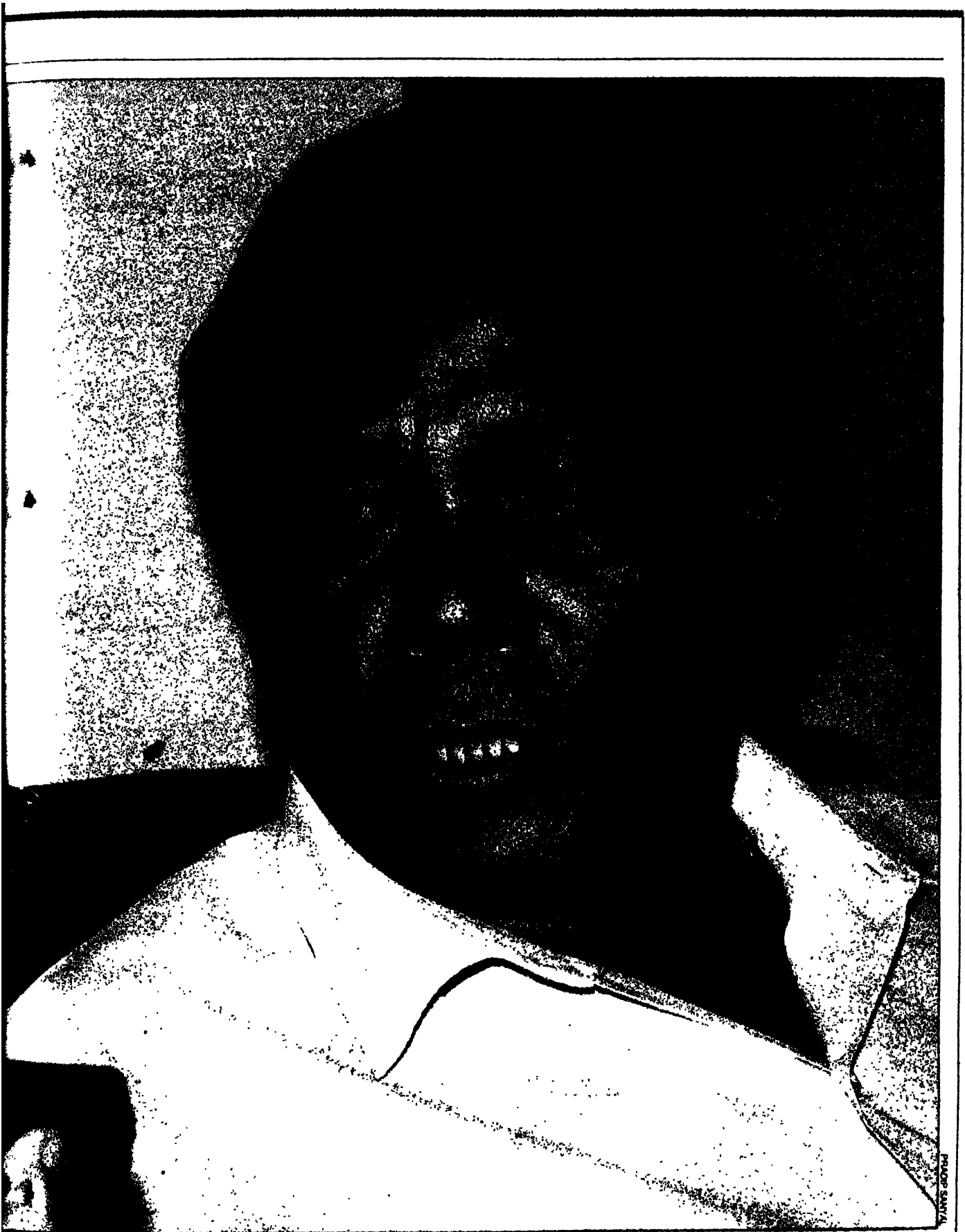
But equally, it is unfair to caricature him as a paunchy, lazy drunk as so many of his colleagues have over the last week. Yes, he does epitomise the laid-back, fun-loving, high-living, hard-drinking, hawai-chappal wearing, north-eastern male. But his politics must be kept separate from his lifestyle.

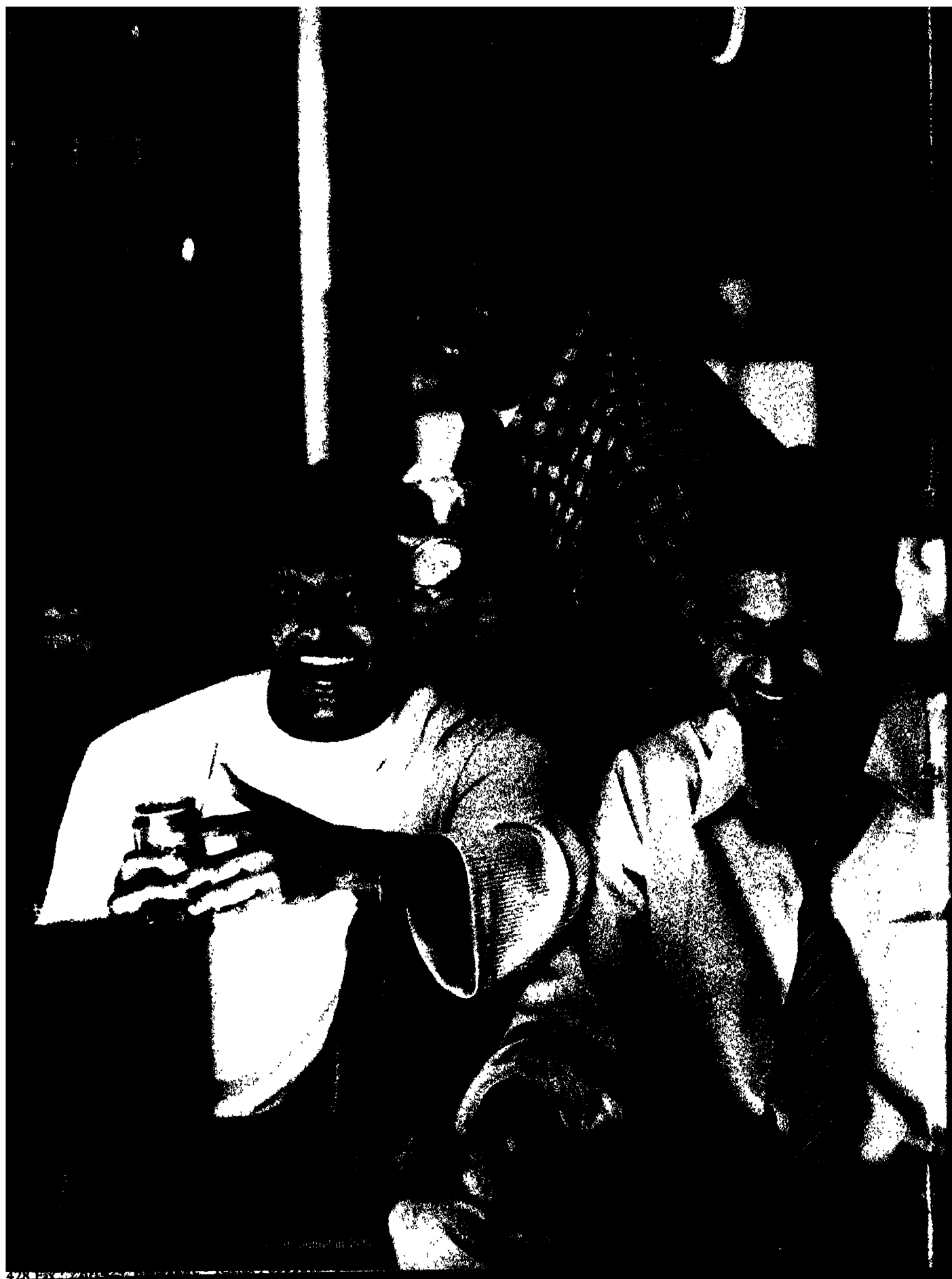
The most plausible explanation for his behaviour is megalomania. A minor minister who had been a deeply unsuccessful chief minister of Meghalaya (he was forced to resign after a revolt from his MLAs) he suddenly sprang to national prominence when he became Lok Sabha Speaker in 1996. His frequent television appearances and his high media profile (he is something of an interview junkie) led him to believe that he could become Prime Minister.


As bizarre as this sounds, his friends suggest that he genuinely believed that Sonia would choose either Manmohan Singh or him to become Prime Minister. As a Christian, he thought he stood a better chance than Singh. When he realised that this was not to be, so great was his disappointment that he went berserk.

Nevertheless, it is hard to see how he will gain from this rebellion. Even assuming that Pawar can pull it off, nobody is going to make Sangma Prime Minister — certainly not Pawar. The best he can hope for is a Cabinet portfolio in a Third Force government. And he would have got that anyway in a Congress government.

So perhaps the most bizarre explanation is the most accurate. In the end, it was his megalomania that did him in. •







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'CONGRESS IS TH

Renuka Chowdhury on her political shift and more

INTERVIEWED BY PRIYA SAHQAL/NEW DELHI

Last month, the Telugu Desam Party's most visible face in New Delhi joined the Congress. Renuka Chowdhury speaks to SUNDAY about her disillusionment with the TDP, her differences with Chandrababu Naidu and her image in the media.

But she had one request: no questions about Jayaprada. In fact, she took the opportunity to set the record straight — both about the time when she is supposed to have called Prada a bimbo and Naidu a 'pocketmar'. Clearly, she wants to start her new career on the right note.

SUNDAY: Why did you decide to join the Congress?

Renuka Chowdhury: Well, in the long term, the Congress is the only answer. It has the secular credentials, it is the oldest party and has the experience of running a government. Even when it was a minority government, it is the only party that has given us a five-year rule.

Q: Then why did it take you so long to realise all this?

A: It's not that I took long to realise [this]...I belonged to a regional party. It was very exciting and challenging at that time to transform Telugu Desam from a regional to a national party which we did in a span of ten years — from 1982 to 1992.

There were others like me who were young, idealistic, first-time politicians who believed that we could shake the earth. So it's not that it took me long. It's just that one doesn't switch parties to suit oneself all the time.

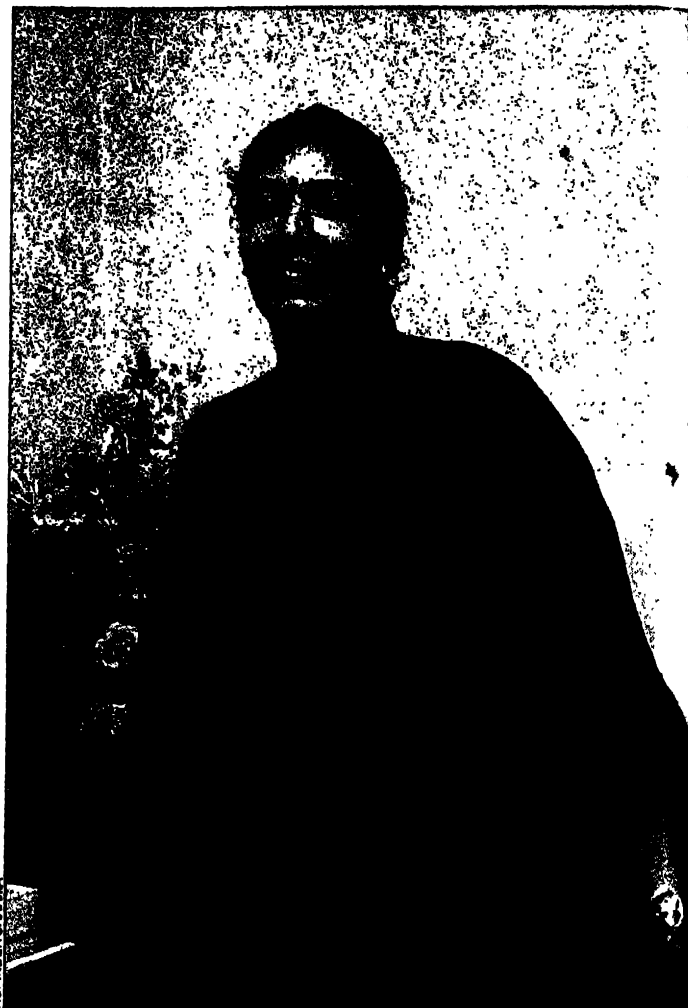
Q: But this is exactly the charge levelled against you: that you have switched parties to suit yourself.

A: What is the gain I am getting, tell me? What is the gain?

Q: Well, you were definitely out of favour with Chandrababu Naidu, so there was little scope for you in the TDP.

A: Tell me, is the party an end in itself? Associating with a political party is a means to an end — the end being your nation. But if the party has changed its own direction, and I cannot associate with its ideology anymore, then how can you accuse me?

He [Naidu] changes his base every year. He was a Congress minister when he challenged NTR. And it is rather ironic that today they are accusing me of joining the Congress when their own chief has come from the Congress. Then he changed sides and came into the Desam and after he entered, the divisive politics between the two sons-in-law started. Then he started marginalising the other son-in-law.



"I think it helps to be a woman. It helps that I speak so many languages, that I was voluble in Parliament and visible outside"

Q: How do you always manage to get embroiled in controversies?

A: Because I was born on Friday the 13th.

Q: But there is a perception about you, that you always want more, that you were sulking because you wanted to head the party's *mahila* wing.

A: No, no. I don't want. My God...if they gave it free to me, I wouldn't take it. I just don't want to be head of the *mahila* wing. I was very happy in my job as member of Par-

THE ONLY ANSWER'

liament. I worked for that and I think I did bring some credit and glory to the party.

I was the more visible face of the Telugu Desam. I have never held a party post. In spite of all this hoo-ha made about me, in the 16 years I have worked for the party, I have never held a party post.

Q: Was it because you were never offered one, or because you did not want one?

A: No, no. I never asked for it and it was never offered. The one time I won a secret ballot for a municipal corporation election, I was asked not to accept it by Shri Chandrababu Naidu who was general secretary at the time because of my caste factor. He said NTR and you are of the same caste so it won't look nice. That was okay. It's part of the team spirit. No big deal.

Q: Then what happened to the team spirit when you were denied a Rajya Sabha renomination?

A: That is a total untruth. I have to say this on record. It's a regional party. I have been nominated to the Rajya Sabha seat twice from Andhra Pradesh by Shri N.T. Rama Rao. There was no question of my asking for a third term.

But I did ask for a Lok Sabha ticket. We were five ministers of the Telugu Desam at the Centre. If four ministers — who are men — have been given an opportunity, then I must be given the same opportunity. It's not more. I have never asked for more, but I have asked for the same. If I am fit enough to be your minister at the Centre, then I am fit enough to fight a Lok Sabha [election].

Q: But you have never fought a Lok Sabha election. You fought one Assembly election which you lost.

A: The Assembly election was a joke. I was pitted against a sitting chief minister (Vijaya Bhaskara Reddy) whose election had to be regularised. It wasn't a free and fair election for me and none of the men in my party came forward to contest. And just because I never fought a Lok Sabha [election] doesn't mean I can't fight one ever.

Q: Are you hoping to get a Lok Sabha ticket from the Congress?

A: No. I have not asked the Congress for anything, just as I never asked the Telugu Desam.

Q: What about your public criticism of your chief minister? You are on record saying that he looks like a 'pocketmar'.

A: I am sick and tired of being a media victim. I was not interviewed at all. They have shown an imitation of a translation — I am translating what someone else said in Telugu and this is what was shown. And Babu knows this. There was no provocation for me at that time to abuse the chief minister.

You see, there are so few women who are visible in political life that we also become victims. You are cut and pruned

to meet a certain image. And unfortunately, politicians like us are not trained to deal with the media. When we joined politics, we did not know that we have to be stars and TV savvy.

Q: But you managed that all the same.

A: I think it helps to be a woman. It helps that I speak so many languages, that I was voluble in Parliament and visible outside.



"He [Chandrababu Naidu] changes his base every year"

Q: But there are other women in your party who have not had the same success rate.

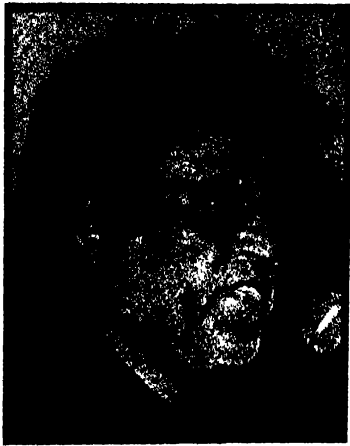
A: (*Laughs*) Yes, there is one more. But there have been other women. We had a wonderful woman in the Lok Sabha, Mrs [G.] Sharda, who was a celebrity in her own right. She has won three national awards — Urvashi awards — for acting.

Q: What's this about your party and actresses?

A: (*Laughs*) You'll have to ask the party president that! The other one was Jayaprada. And I am the re-actress. These kind of witticisms are what get me into trouble (*laughs again*). But if they are not quoted in the spirit in which they are said, that's when it gets dirty. Like my calling that woman a bimbo.

Q: Did you actually call Jayaprada a bimbo?

A: I swear on God I didn't. What I said is that all of us women go through [a stage] when you are young, you are more interested in your looks, you behave like bimbos. And later you go into your various roles. That's how I said it. But of course, it was two words taken from different interviews and put together. What do you do? I am the loser. •



Back with a bang

Rajnikant's Padayappa is a superhit

His fans refer to him as One - Man Industry. Superstar Rajnikant has once again saved the Tamil film industry from yet another crisis. Released on 10 April, his latest magnum opus *Padayappa* has become a mega hit. In an industry which is literally starving of superhits, *Padayappa* is likely to do business worth Rs 40 crore.

It is a typical Rajnikant movie. A rehash of all his earlier 150-odd movies, *Padayappa* is loaded with scenes and dialogues that will boost Rajnikant's image. As G.V. Venkateswaran of G.V. Films and a close associate of Rajnikant said: "The 190-minute entertainer is strictly for Rajani fans who are having a good time in theatres watching the film."

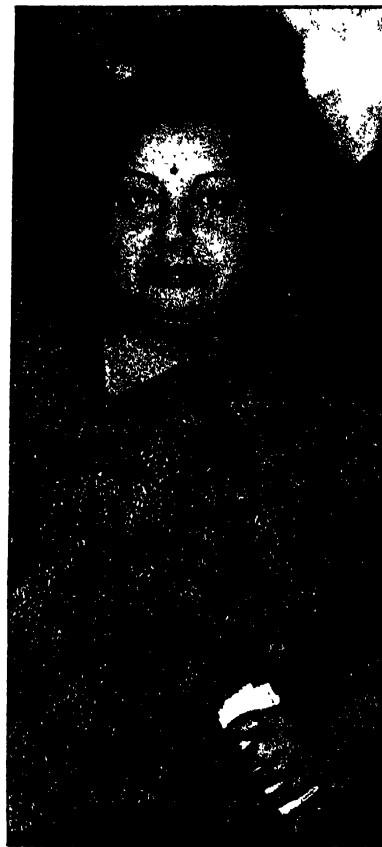
Rajnikant's last release, *Arunachalam*, two years back, bombed in the box-office. The film was released after Rajnikant supported TMC-DMK front in the 1996 state elections. This was a great news of joy for Rajnikant's bete-noire, Jayalalitha. Since then, his fans have been insisting Rajani to join politics, but he has declined to do so. Rajnikant, who is a Maharashtrian by birth, is said to be a BJP sympathiser.

After the failure of *Arunachalam* in 1997, he started working on the script of *Padayappa*. Meanwhile, the TMC was wiped out by Jayalalitha's AIADMK. In the 1998 elections, Rajnikant campaigned for the TMC-DMK combine though his heart was with the BJP. No wonder going by the star's public posture, when Jayalalitha-BJP combine swept polls in the 1998 elections, people started writing the obituary of Rajnikant's mass appeal. Even Jayalalitha made snide remarks about the aging "superstar". Raj-

nikant Fans Association, which has a membership of one crore, was livid and now wanted Rajani to hit back.

After *Padayappa*'s release, the wheel has turned full circle. Jayalalitha, who is seen as the person responsible for the fall of BJP government, has suffered a major blow. And her popularity is at an

Jayalalitha: *Padayappa* is a dig at her by Rajnikant



Hoardings of *Padayappa* put up at Madras: a mega hit

all time low. In fact, Rajani's film couldn't have been better timed. The main female character in *Padayappa*, Neelambari, played by sexy Ramya, is a negative role modelled on Jayalalitha. Neelambari is portrayed as haughty, mean and avengeful. Ramya takes a liking for Rajnikant who does not reciprocate and instead falls for her maid-servant played by Soundarya.

The film is a boon for Rajnikant fans. Because whatever they wanted to be said against Jayalalitha has been expressed through *Padayappa*. "Rajnikant has given equal footage to Ramya, whose arrogant posture especially when she ridicules the hero is well brought out by director K.S. Ravi Kumar," said Natara-



jan a Rajnikant fan, who was seeing *Padayappa* for the fifth time in a week. "The way he has hit out at Neelambari is a fitting reply to Jayalalitha."

The dialogues are also a big hit and drawing the audience again and again to theatres. Rajnikant plays to the gallery and is very stylish in such lines as "My path is a separate path, don't cross it". He completes the dialogues with his characteristic swish of fingers. The film is replete with political innuendos.

In fact, *Padayappa* has nothing new to offer except his anti-feminist views and tirades indirectly aimed at Jayalalitha. Luckily for Rajnikant, the film has come at a time when Jaya is being held responsible for the fall of Vajpayee government.

Rajnikant is an icon, something more than a phenomenon in Tamil Nadu. "A normal big-budget Tamil film fetches

only Rs 8 crore but *Padayappa* was sold for over Rs 20 crore," said Mariappan, the manager of the posh Albert Complex in Madras, where *Padayappa* is being screened. "We have been screening all Rajani hits and his fans ensure that all shows are house full. *Padayappa* will definitely go full for more than 150 days. Our canteen sales during this period will also shoot up."

According to Radha Ravi, who plays a minor villain in the film and is also the president of film workers union: "Today Rajani is dominating a part of Tamil Nadu economy. *Padayappa* has generated employment and income for thousands of people especially when the film industry is in doldrums."

Now it is the turn of the multinationals and corporate houses to discover the star-value commanded by Raj-

nikant. Unlike other film stars and sports personalities, who appear in event marketing and product promotion campaigns, Rajnikant has not yet given his name directly to anyone. But now MNCs like Pepsi, Hindustan Lever, etc., are determined to exploit his star value. The corporate houses have decided to sponsor tickets of *Padayappa* either directly or through retail chains. "I was zapped and thrilled to witness the response of the audience when Mr Rajnikant appeared on the screen," said a Pepsi official.

Interestingly, the Rajani magic is working not only in Tamil Nadu but also in Japan. Rajnikant's unflagging swagger and oh-so-cool wrist flicks have swayed millions in Japan, where his 150th film *Muthu* (released in India in January 1996) is the biggest grosser there after *Titanic*. Running for over 25 weeks, the film has been watched by more than 1,27,000 in Tokyo's theatres. The film is said to have collected as much as US\$1.7 million.

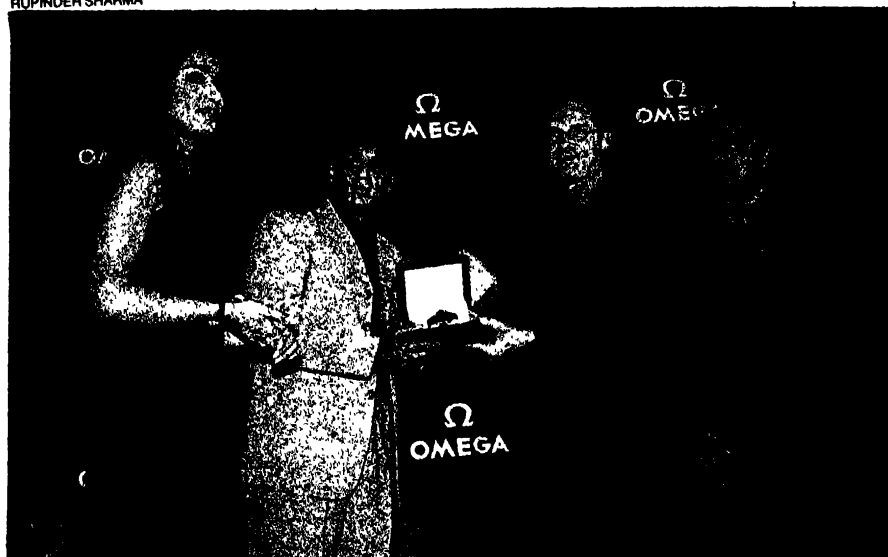
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Said B. Kandaswamy Bharathan, the executive producer of *Kavithalaya*, the company that produced *Muthu* and the brain behind marketing the film: "The movie according to Japanese viewers carried an important message — that money is not everything in life." Kandaswamy said that Rajnikant's films have the right mix of song and dance. Plus, it also has correct mix of values and entertainment.

Meanwhile, political parties are vying with each other to bring Rajnikant into politics. But Rajnikant is proving to be elusive. •

Sreedhar Pillai/Madras

RUPINDER SHARMA



UNPUNCTUAL? SO WHAT, WE'RE STARS

■ In timeless starland, wristwatches and other time devices can be mere adornments, even though its exalted denizens may themselves be promoting them. At the recent launch function of the Swiss watch company, Omega, in Delhi, filmworld's hottest icon **Shah Rukh Khan**, Omega's new brand ambassador, arrived more than four hours late — much after dinner was over and the make-up had streamed off the faces of the waiting glitterati. Shah Rukh's vivacious co-ambassador, supermodel **Cindy Crawford** was less unpunctual: last year when the company invited her to India, Cindy sashayed in a little more than three hours after the scheduled time. Thankfully, the similarities end there. While Cindy was snobbish with Indian journoes refusing to talk to them, Shah Rukh, in a recent television interview, was endearingly candid. "I'll be shattered when people fail to recognise me and I'm no longer considered hot property," he confided to his interviewer.



WEDDING BELLS, YES. BUT WHO'S THE GIRL?

■ Unfortunately, **Jatin Kochar** isn't telling us. The designer, who's planning to marry soon, gave reporters a tantalising answer when asked about his would-be bride. "Someone who walked up to me to discuss my clothes," he said. "But it was only when we got talking about fitness and exercise that things hotted up between us." Why settle down at all, especially when designers aren't usually marrying types. Possibly he's sick of all those late-night carousals. Or maybe, after the Tamarind Court affair, he's just scared that one drunken night some sozzled Romeo might walk up to his girlfriend and shoot her dead. Congratulations, all the same.

BOY GENIUS

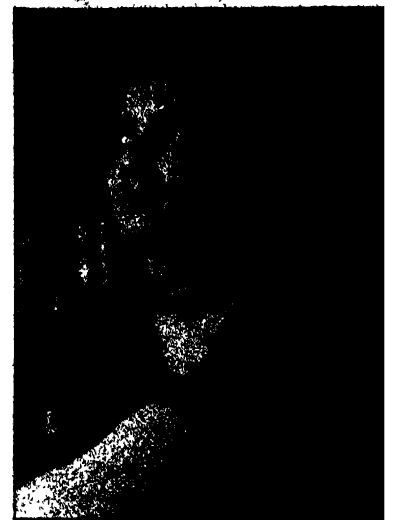
It sure helps to have a high-profile dad, but if you don't have it in you, chances are you won't make it very far either. Delhi's demolition man K.J. Alphons' son **Adarsh**, whose paintings have been printed on a calendar and also compiled into a book, now sails abroad to exhibit his art. The 13-year-old whose works



are on show at Delhi's India Habitat Centre, blends a refreshing mix of talent and awareness — one of his paintings is on Kosovo. The release function was a much-hyped event with the President himself inaugurating it.

OUT OF SYNC

Literary awards don't necessarily grant you immunity from law. In an age when being eco-friendly is 'in', Booker Prize-winning author **Arundhati Roy** seems terribly out of sync. Roy and her husband **Pradeep Krishen** have been served a show-cause



LIKE A POEM THEY UNFOLD

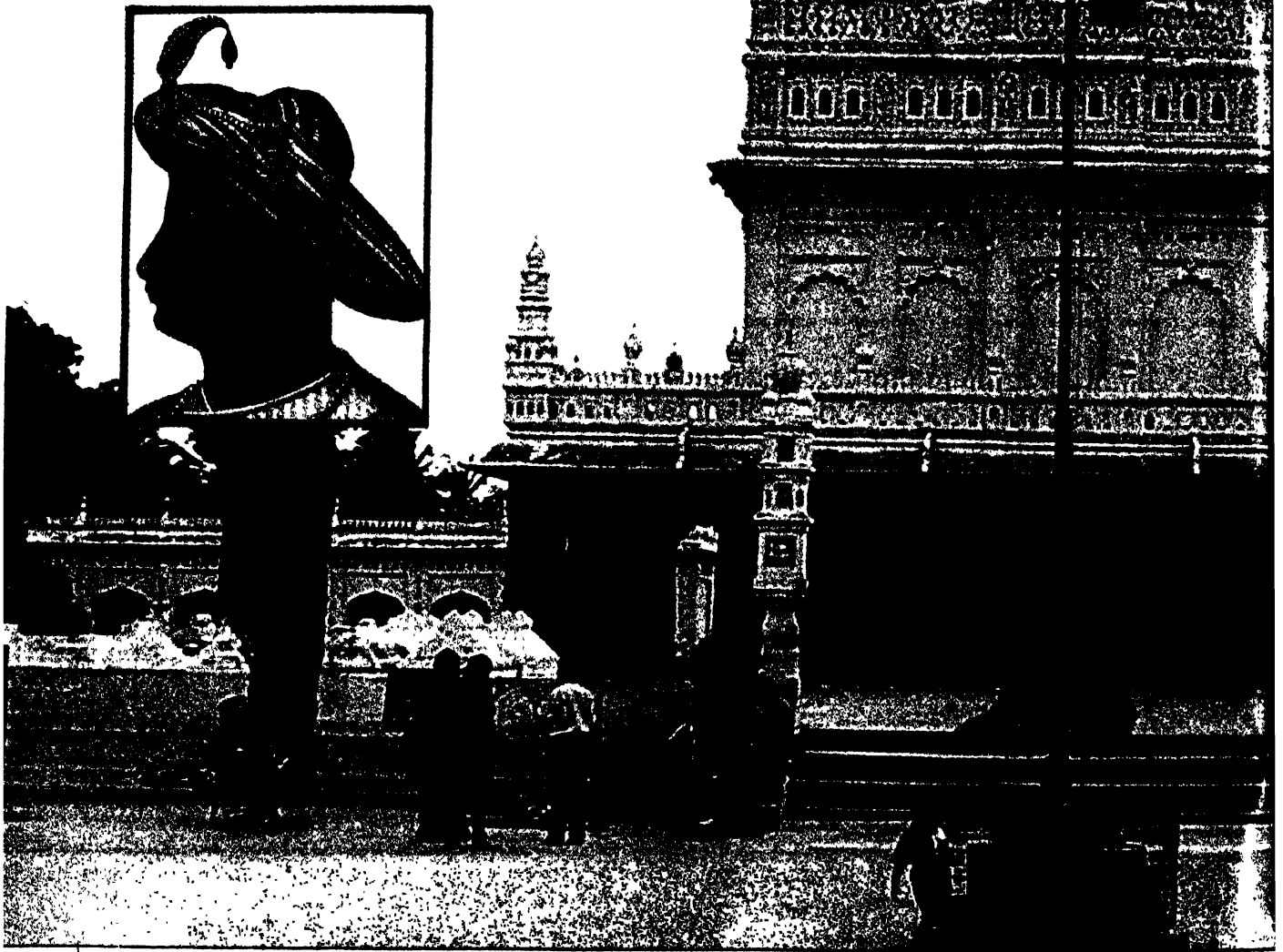
"Witness the woods after dark, when humanfolk have retired for the day and out from the shrubbery emerge the real inhabitants of the forest — the wood nymphs..."

High fashion and high poetry come together. Couturier **Deepika Govind**, who's designed for rave models like Nafisa Joseph and Sri Krupa Murali, took off into sensuous — and philosophical — orbits at her recent fashion show, *The Enchanted Forest*, in Bangalore. While her models swayed down the walk, the press release had evocative phrases like 'femininity is in moving away from formal suits' and motifs which were reflections of the 'Japanese concept of space, time and spirituality'. In the profession for the last three-and-a-half years, the lady who's done everything from writing on fashion to styling for shoots and ad films, claims she is a minimalist. "For me, the woman has to speak louder than the garments," she says. "Her clothes are just an accessory to her personality."



notice by the Special Area Development Authority of Panchmarhi for alleged violation of building laws and illegal construction in a notified eco-sensitive area. The couple owns a two-storeyed house in the hill resort which falls in an area where construction is prohibited by law. Has transgression brought penitence? Apparently not. The two, it seems, are perfecting the art of what can be called constructive non-response. Last heard, they were adding another floor to the house.

Digging



Like any other big event, this one comes with its share of troubles. Only this time it got a little out of hand.

The Karnataka state government's plan to commemorate the bicentenary of Tipu Sultan's death spelt disaster from the word go. It started with their inability to decide on a date. Though the official date of death of the King of Mysore is 4 May, 1799; for the state government it mattered little. Although official sources say the celebrations were postponed

because "choice of a chief guest posed some problems"; unofficially, sources confirm it was basically a "tussle for one-upmanship" that delayed the process.

Finally, when a private organisation had the celebrations on the scheduled day and the Governor, Khurshid Alam Khan, agreed to be the chief guest there, government authorities went into a tizzy and the Governor was dissuaded from participating in any such function, till the state government got its act together.

To top it all and predictably enough, there was the Bajrang Dal that threaten-

ed to disrupt the celebrations.

As part of the ongoing celebrations, the Karnataka state government finally made up for lost time by hosting a seminar with participants from all over the world and a string of other events in Mysore from 15 May onwards. Besides, delays are something people of the state have got used to by now, as they are all part of the regular bureaucratic red tapism and petty politics.

However, this recent controversy has opened up a Pandora's box. Is Tipu Sultan a *real* hero? Is there is any *real* need

up the PAST

Was Tipu Sultan a valiant patriot or a religious fanatic? Hindu fundamentalists question his credentials as a national hero



Tipu's tomb

to glorify him? These are the questions which have raised their heads all over again.

"Definitely there is a need to highlight the fact that Tipu Sultan was one king who is respected like a saint," says Roshan Baig, Karnataka tourism minister and member of the organising committee on the bicentenary celebrations. "In fact, he is the only king for whom people offer prayers in the month of Urs, which is meant primarily for Sufi saints," he adds.

According to Baig, celebrating Tipu's death anniversary with such fanfare is not new, "We do it every year but this time it was bigger because this happens to be the bicentenary anniversary," he explains. As far as Baig is concerned, there is no discounting the fact that Tipu Sultan, the King of Mysore, was a valiant warrior who fought the British.

But Hindu outfits like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Bajrang Dal do not seem to think so. Their contention being, that Tipu is needlessly being glorified when in reality he was a

religious fanatic. "To begin with, Tipu Sultan and Haider Ali were not rightful heirs to the throne," says V. Nagraj, in-charge of the Ideology and Intellectual cell of the RSS. "They usurped the throne of the kings of Mysore," he adds.

The other controversy that has consistently dogged Tipu Sultan and has been a sore point with Hindu outfits is his role in Malabar and Mangalore region of Kerala (see box on Sanjay Khan's serial 'The Sword of Tipu Sultan'). Tipu Sultan, till date, remains a much-hated and maligned personality in the state. "It is no secret that so many people in that area were forcibly converted to Islam," says Nagraj. "It was for no great love of the religion that so many people converted, it was a result of atrocities against them."

The alleged 'forcible' conversions in Kerala and Mysore make the 'son of Karnataka' a villain in that region.

Muslims look at it differently. "Nobody can question the secular credentials of Tipu," says Baig. "The likes of Bajrang Dal have unnecessarily politicised the whole issue," he adds. According to Baig and other like-minded people, Tipu was misunderstood on many occasions.

One such story is that of Tipu's trip to the Malabar region in Kerala. Apparently, while in Malabar, Tipu saw some topless tribal women. Tipu-sympathisers claim he was appalled to see their plight and ordered clothes for them. Cynics interpret the same gesture as forcing women to *purdha*.

There seems to be no middle-path for those who have already made up their minds on these issues. But rationalists have a different view to offer.

"Post-Independence India was looking for heroes," explains Suman Venkatesh, a professor of French at the Bangalore University who has also done extensive work on Tipu Sultan. "Tipu had resisted the English, was very progressive and in a way ahead of most of his contemporaries—just fitted the bill to be hailed as a hero," she adds.



Suman Venkatesh was threatened by a group of Muslims when she was about to mount an exhibition. Being a Hindu, she had no business talking about Tipu Sultan, they said

The professor feels that there was a strong need to glorify the past and the common thread to any glorification was — a brave resistance to the British. "Those who fought the British became heroes as freedom was the most sought-after thing at that time," complains Venkatesh.

And keeping that in mind, Tipu's was a legitimate claim. He fought four bat-

tles against the English.

Besides, what happened in the past was a different ball game altogether. There now seems to be a race to 'own' or 'disown' Tipu, to meet political ends. "Besides, irrational claims of the Bajrang Dal, what bothers me is the fact that Tipu was not a Muslim king as Muslims make him out to be," says Venkatesh. "He was a great king who lived and died

for freedom and that's what is important," she adds.

The lobbying makes sense when studied in the light of the political mileage that politicians gained out of it. For instance, Venkatesh narrates an incident when she was intimidated by a group of Muslims to stop her project work on Tipu Sultan. In 1992, she was putting up an exhibition on Tipu Sultan in Bangalore when a group of 40 Muslims headed by Tipu's sixth grandson (who recently quit the BJP after the party's opposition to the celebrations on Tipu Sultan's death anniversary) threatened her. She was asked to back out on religious



Manoor Ali Khan: "Dr Abdul Kalam was inspired by Tipu Sultan's great scientific approach"

ROSHAN BAIG, tourism minister, Janata Dal:

"It is a known fact that Tipu Sultan made generous contributions to Hindu temples. There is just no doubt about his secular credentials. He had a temple within the premises of his palace, which he visited regularly. His reign as the king of Mysore is significant for its religious harmony and progressive approach in the field of business and technology"

V. NAGRAJ, Intellectual and Ideology, cell in-charge, RSS:

"Being a Muslim king he saw to it that Hindus convert to Islam. For that matter, besides the Hindus, atrocities towards Catholic Christians were also common. So many of them were put in jails and also tortured. Moreover, Tipu

Feedback

Sultan built a mosque in the Hindu temple of Lord Narsimha in Shrirangapatnam"

R.V. DESHPANDE, senior leader, Congress: "Tipu Sultan is



a well-known historical figure. Where is the harm in commemorating his death anniversary? It seems like the Bajrang Dal has no good business to do but just go around disturbing peace and harmony wherever they are"

SUMAN VENKATESH, chairperson, dept of foreign languages, Bangalore University:

"Nobody is above one's own personal faith and beliefs. Being a king and following the code of those times, if Tipu punished the Hindus he did the same for the Muslims as well. But besides being secular he was also a visionary and a man of great learning. Despite poor communication he was well aware of the French Revolution and the American war of Independence"

This is not the first time that something to do with Tipu Sultan has created such a furor. The first such controversy happened in 1990. Sanjay Khan's TV serial *The Sword of Tipu Sultan* raised questions related to the portrayal of the great hero and his role in Indian history. The debate that went on for days was followed by a court case.

Trouble began when the Bombay Malyali Samaj and the Hindu Ekjut began to protest about the choice of subject. Their contention was similar to the recent allegations against Tipu Sultan. The Malyali Samaj alleged that Tipu was a man who took pleasure in humiliating Hindus, ravaging their places of worship. They further claimed that the atrocities he wreaked on the people of Malabar alone was reason enough not to glorify him in a television serial.

These organisations raised objections to the telecast of the serial on the grounds that it depicts Tipu as a hero, when in reality he was a fanatic who slew people in the name of religion. As the protests grew more vociferous, the I&B ministry had no choice but to appoint an expert committee to study the authenticity of the serial. A petition at the Bombay High Court was also filed by Dr Ravindra Ramdas, a Bombay-based historian, along with Ravi Verma, a social scientist and R.G. Menon, former director of the Reserve Bank of India. The petitioners claimed that historians have described that period as the darkest era for the people of the south, specially Mysore and Kerala.

However, Sanjay Khan maintained that Tipu Sultan was not a newly discovered hero. In Karnataka, there was a train named after him; in temples there are silver vessels which bear the inscription presented by Tipu Sultan and Air India has chosen to glorify him by naming a plane after him.

The argument went on till the court and the review committee allowed Khan to carry on with his serial without any interruptions.

Eyewash?

Sanjay Khan's TV serial on Tipu was accused of glorifying a fanatic



THE SWORD OF TIPU SULTAN

this. Khan was instrumental in putting together a detailed site on Tipu Sultan on the worldwide web. "Dr APJ Abdul Kalam said he was inspired by Tipu Sultan and his great scientific approach towards modern day rocketry," says Khan. He is all admiration for Tipu's great business sense. But celebrating the event, for him, was most important

because Tipu Sultan upholds secular values. "I was pretty uninitiated when I started my research and by the end of it Tipu was my hero, my role-model," he gushes.

The singular dearth of heroes in the times we live in has left us with little option but to relive moments of glory from the past. Packaging heroes from the history in glossy wrappers and putting them high up on the pedestal seems to be the only way out for those desperately in search of 'role models'.

Ironically, as the country takes bigger strides into the future, it keeps going into the past for all the wrong reasons.

Even as the debate is still on, there are a few others who have a lot to gain from the controversy as long as it is kept alive.

"Controversy or whatever, I'm happy because it makes people curious and gives the tourist a reason to visit Mysore," smiles a Bangalore-based tour operator. Which shows how attempts to glorify heroes from the past are often reduced to mere marketing gimmicks.

And Tipu Sultan has seen it all — his tombstone has doubled as wickets for children who play cricket and now he is a bait to give the sagging tourism industry a boost.

So much for a 'hero'. •

Anuja Joshi/Bangalore

grounds since being a Hindu she had 'no business' talking about Tipu Sultan. "It is such an irony that a great secularist like Tipu Sultan is survived by people like that," complains Venkatesh.

Venkatesh translated the letters of Tipu Sultan that he had written to the French, asking for help against the British. She is helping the state government to put up an exhibition on Tipu Sultan in Paris in September this year. Personally, Venkatesh is convinced that Tipu was a great visionary.

Mansoor Ali Khan of the Al Ameen Foundation in Bangalore corroborates

Even as the debate continues, tour operators have reason to smile. The controversy gives the curious tourist a reason to visit Mysore

On the first day of the Bengali New Year, when locals, passers-by and a few cinema-crazy people swarmed in into the sprawling courtyard of an old mansion in Hari Ghosh Street in North Calcutta (some sneaked in and some craned their necks from the balconies of adjoining buildings to catch a view), to watch a sharp-featured, lanceolate-eyed lady clad in jeans and sneakers calling the shots, filming an elaborate Hindu ceremony of last rites for which almost the entire cast (generations of people from the extended family) come together, they couldn't have known that this same woman would, within a couple of days, face the camera, playing an elderly widow, wearing white with a dash of grey in her hair and still manage to look as stunning nonetheless.

That she would go about on the sets of that same house, reconstructed on the

In Paromitar Ekdin, Aparna Sen performs both behind and in front of the camera

DOUBLE



ROLE

floor of Technicians' Studio in Tollygunge, complete with stained glass alcoves and walls made to look as if they have not been painted for years, putting all the bell-metal articles on one shelf and dusting the marble-topped dining table ("There should be a method as to how the room is arranged," she would say. "Can Sanaka's domain be so disorderly?"). That she would do umpteen rehearsals with the cast before each take because she is shooting on a shoe-string budget and the film needed to be completed in just five weeks and she couldn't afford to shoot the same sequence more than twice; and then run behind the camera for a look-through and run back again to face it, slipping in and out of role-playing with practised ease.

It isn't as easy as it looks though. The producer of film-maker-actress Aparna Sen's new film, *Paromitar Ekdin* (A Day in the Life of Paromita), insisted that Sen played one of the two female leads. "Had I been just the director I'd have felt the strain less," agrees Sen, hastening to add that in a way it is good that she is also acting because "since I had written the character I understand it

very well. To get somebody else to perform the way I want ... that's a difficult job."

Sen plays Sanaka, the gorgeous matriarch, a woman of great intelligence and personality who spends most of her life within the confines of a crumbling old Calcutta house. The film is woven around her relationship with Paromita, the young daughter-in-law who eventually walks out of her marriage but the bond with the mother-in-law survives. In *Paromita*, the educated, individualistic, rational and spirited woman, it is not difficult to find an extension of Sen herself. She is firm without being arrogant, gentle and loving to the members of her family by marriage without being subservient, and manages to retain her composure in the most tense situations.

A true replica of the way Sen is on the sets, as indeed in life. A life, in which she can and does accommodate a thousand things — acting, direction, poetry recitals, editing a magazine, inaugurating events, decorating her home, playing mother and wife, picking up the odd vagrant woman from the street. In the

GAUTAM ROY



AUTAM ROY



Sen directs Soumitra Chattopadhyay on the sets of *Paromita Ekdin* (above) and (left) a still from the film

film, when Paromita sees Sanaka for the first time, which coincides with her entry into the household after her wedding, she looks at her in awe and wonder. Sen too, with her versatility, leadership and ability to excel in whatever she does, continues to amaze us.

Everytime she shoots in public places, there's a crowd. Even when she is shooting with a star cast, it is this attractive and quick-witted woman on the wrong side of 50 that people want to watch. Isn't celebrity an additional hassle for a filmmaker? "On the contrary, it's easier," says Sen, always one to look at the positive side of things. "People are very receptive, ready to help. Actors will work for much less in my films, and technicians will put their best foot forward. When you have done some good work which has been recognised, people want to be associated with your work. That's an advantage."

The good work began with Satyajit Ray, who first cast her as the adolescent bride — the tomboyish prankster who discovers the joys of wedded bliss — in *Teen Kanya* (Three Daughters). Although Sen's parents (her father Chidananda Dasgupta is a critically-acclaimed film-maker) were heavily into the film society movement for which reason her initiation into quality films from the West happened quite early, Ray was the guiding light. When she wrote her first film, *36 Chowringhee Lane*, it was Ray who went through the script, okayed it and suggested Shashi Kapoor as producer. The moving tale of a lonely Anglo-Indian school teacher, who is temporarily befriended by her ex-student and her boyfriend only to be disowned as soon as the couple tie the knot and do not need her vacant flat for their afternoon rendezvous, won many hearts and went on to win the Eagle Award at Manila.

In the films that followed — *Paroma*, *Sati*, *Picnic* and *Yuganta* — Sen's lyrical, nostalgic mode of story-telling began to make way for a harsher, more complex, down-to-earth world view. They also questioned the position of women in society — women of all kinds — the incarcerated housewife; the deaf-mute girl who is married off to a tree; the dependant widow who feels insecure when her brother-in-law, who is the provider, is attracted towards her own sister; the talented dancer who stifles her desires for a child and a happy married life under her own ambition.

In Paromita, the educated, individualistic, rational and spirited woman, it is not difficult to find an extension of Sen herself

In *Paromitar Ekdin*, Sen wonders "what happens to a relationship, which is socially determined by marriage, after a divorce. What happens to the feelings when the relationship does not officially exist any more?" What happens when the daughter-in-law cannot participate in the last rites of the mother-in-law who she so loved and admired, and is no less bereaved than others in the family?

At a time when the idea of joint families, and even living with in-laws, is becoming passe, the film can perhaps be viewed as a nostalgia trip, if not an elegy. It is about *paan*-chewing women who wear the house keys in a big bunch tied to their saree-end and spend the afternoons on the verandah, tying each other's hair, exchanging notes about their lives. Bengali rituals associated

or extraordinary human behaviour — is something Sen feels strongly about. There is Sudhapishi in *Paroma*, the mentally-deranged aunt who stayed locked up in the room on the roof — an object of curiosity for the children. In *Paromitar Ekdin*, Khuku, Sanaka's daughter, is a schizophrenic, who sometimes breaks into beautiful songs. Why do these madwomen in the attic keep returning to her films? Sen's contention is that psychological problems, though rampant in society, are hardly ever dealt with realistically in Indian films. That they are either glamorised or "treated as objects of pity. But they are part of the human race as well."

Her ability to empathise with the sick, the repressed, the mentally challenged and the woman who doesn't want to remain trapped forever in a wrong marri-

potboilers.

What keeps her going? It is probably her curiosity, her sense of wonderment. She is a romantic, one of the lasts that we have. Who can forget the young son in *Paroma*, telling his kid brother about the possibility of discovering a new galaxy as they lie side by side at night, in a house that has just begun to cool down after an ugly fight between their parents? In *Yuganta*, when the heroine suddenly plunges into the pool on a rainy day, her skirt billowing, just to shock her boyfriend, which adventure-loving young woman wouldn't want to be in her shoes?

When late in October this year, at the time of the annual Durga Puja, the people of Bengal hit the streets dressed in their festive bests with friends, lovers, family-members and children, and some of them walk into a theatre showing *Paromitar Ekdin*, they wouldn't know that the film is the product of days of combined effort of a dedicated team of technicians, artists and production executives, each of whom had pitched in his best efforts just to be a part of Rinadi's — as they all call Sen — creative enterprise. They wouldn't know how the matinee idol of yesteryears who has made her mark as director-actress both home and abroad, addresses most of her colleagues on the film sets as the more endearing *tui* (you), rather than the formal *apni*, rushing to hitch up the saree of the actress playing the maid servant for maid servants don't wear their sarees covering their ankles when they're mopping the floor and, in the next moment, cuddling the spastic child as a reward for a perfect shot he's just given. They wouldn't know that the film is about building relationships really, relationships that endure — not just involving Sanaka and Paromita who meet as strangers and are separated under extraneous circumstances yet continue to occupy a special place in each other's hearts, but also that between all those people who were involved in the making of the film and the person whose baby it is. All of them may not say it in so many words, but the alacrity with which each responds to her call and hangs upon every word that she says, shows.

But all those people who go for a late-night show in a city awake with the sound of the drum and the roads awash with glittering lights, would not know all that. They will just watch the film. •

Chitralekha Basu/Calcutta



Sen made her debut in films as the adolescent bride in Satyajit Ray's *Teen Kanya*. Ray was her guiding light, the one she shared her ideas with

with marriage and childbirth have been picturised in elaborate detail. So, was Sen trying to record the elements of a receding era, weaving an old world charm? "*Aatkarai* is the ritual performed when a male child is born," explains Sen. "I wanted to show the family members were ecstatic at the birth of a male child, so that I could show the reversal when the child turns out to be a spastic." The blame, inevitably, is heaped on Paromita for giving birth to a freak.

The reluctance to face up to the so-called aberrations that exist in society — be it physical or mental disability in people

age springs out of her sensitive nature, her concern for those around her. Which gels well with her intellect, her modern dress sense and outlook, her English education and her love for poetry. In the Sixties, she had arrived on the screen — the answer to the educated and cultured middle-class Bengali's desires and dreams. Only the other day, her role as the ageing danseuse caught in a difficult relationship with her daughter in Rituparno Ghosh's *Unishe April* proved once again what a consummate actress she is, that she hadn't lost her magic touch even after acting in a whole lot of

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A TWIST IN

CBI officers and key prosecution witnesses are show-caused for defrauding the judiciary in the Purulia arms drop case

"If the false evidence with oblique motive can be given in the Apex Court, a serious view for the same has to be taken to, maintain a modicum of fairness in the courts below. This apart, the increasing tendency of taking recourse to objectionable means to get a favourable verdict in the courts has to be viewed gravely to deter the large number of persons approaching Courts from doing so. Such a tendency is required to be curbed, which requires somewhat deterrent sentence."

— Supreme Court (Chandra Sashi vs Anil Kumar Verma)

Lies, lies, and more lies. That was the CBI's winning formula to swing the Purulia arms drop case. But the strategy has backfired. When the country's premier investigative agency filed the charge-sheet in March 1996, it was confident that it had an open-and-shut case on its hands. Its investigators had amassed a huge body of evidence, and that it was only a matter of time, it had imagined, before Peter Bleach, a British arms dealer, and six Latvians, the crew of a plane used in the mission, were convicted on charges of abetting a conspiracy to wage war against the state. Bleach and the Latvians were facing trial for air-dropping arms at Purulia, West Bengal, close to mid-night on 17 December 1995. And, if convicted, could be hanged or sentenced for life.

But a little over three years later, the case looks more open than shut, and it's in no way clear as to who, ultimately, will face conviction: the accused or their prosecutors. And, ironically, it is the pile of evidence trained on Bleach and the Latvians that may finally let the CBI down, for the court feels that, prima facie, there are reasons to believe that evidence has been tampered with and falsely fabricated.

Responding to a series of petitions filed by a Calcutta-based legal activist, Deepak Kumar Prahladka, the sessions court ordered on 30 April and 4 May that show-cause notices be served on key investigators to explain why criminal proceedings should not be initiated against them. They have been accused of making false statements and giving false and tampered evidence to mislead the court and secure the conviction of Bleach and the Latvians.

Prahladka intervened in the trial last year by dint of peti-

Peter Bleach (standing on the van) and members of the Latvian crew: expecting a fair trial



PRADIP SANYAL

THE TRIAL



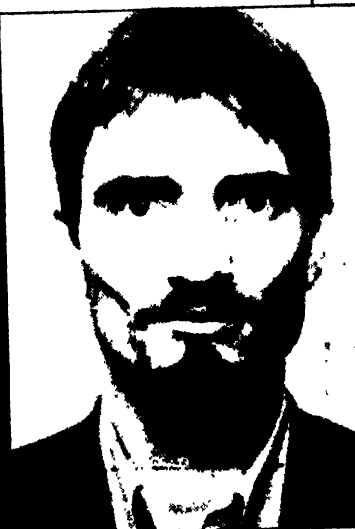
tions under Section 340 of the CrPC, which gives any person the right to step in if he or she comes to know of false evidence being given in any judicial proceeding.

In his petitions, Prahladka has argued that the CBI decided to frame Bleach and the Latvians after Kim Peter Davy, the organiser of the mission, managed to escape or was allowed to get away at Bombay's Sahar Airport. Davy mysteriously disappeared in the early hours of 22.12.95, soon after the plane in which they were travelling from Madras to Karachi was forced to land at Bombay. With the kingpin gone, the CBI chose to make scapegoats of Bleach and the Latvians, feels Prahladka.

Tampering of evidence is considered a serious offence. The Supreme Court is known to have despatched several police officers to jail after having found them guilty of scuppering

The AN-26B plane was refuelled in Bombay to enable it to take off for Karachi.

Prahladka says that the CBI concocted its story to implicate Bleach after Kim Davy managed to give everybody the slip



the flow of justice by withholding facts, telling lies and doctoring documents. In the Purulia case, Prahladka has accused the CBI of having done all that, and Justice P.K. Biswas agrees that the charges are not unfounded.

Among those who have been hauled up are Lokenath Behra, superintendent of police of the CBI Special Crime Branch and the overall in-charge of the case, chief investigating officer P.S. Mukhopadhyay of the CBI, Debabrata Thakur, the then deputy superintendent of police, CID West Bengal, Detective Sergeant S.L. Elcock of the North Yorkshire Police Special Branch, and two officers-in-charge of police stations in Purulia under whose jurisdiction the drop zone lay. They have been given till 10 June to respond, and could face criminal proceedings if they failed to rebut the charges to the court's satisfaction. If convicted, all of them may be sentenced for life.

"What remains of the prosecution!" chides Prahladka. "With its main players being indicted for making a mockery

of the judicial process and undermining the prestige of the court, the CBI finds itself in a big mess."

Prahladka's petitions suggest (and the court has taken cognizance of them) that attempts to falsify the facts had begun on Day One.

In January 1997, SUNDAY had done a major investigation (*Our Story*, 5—11 January) into the Purulia incident and had said that the CBI was suppressing vital facts from the court, chasing red herrings and perhaps shielding key conspirators both in India and abroad, and was probably engaged in a massive cover-up operation. Now, two years later, the petitions

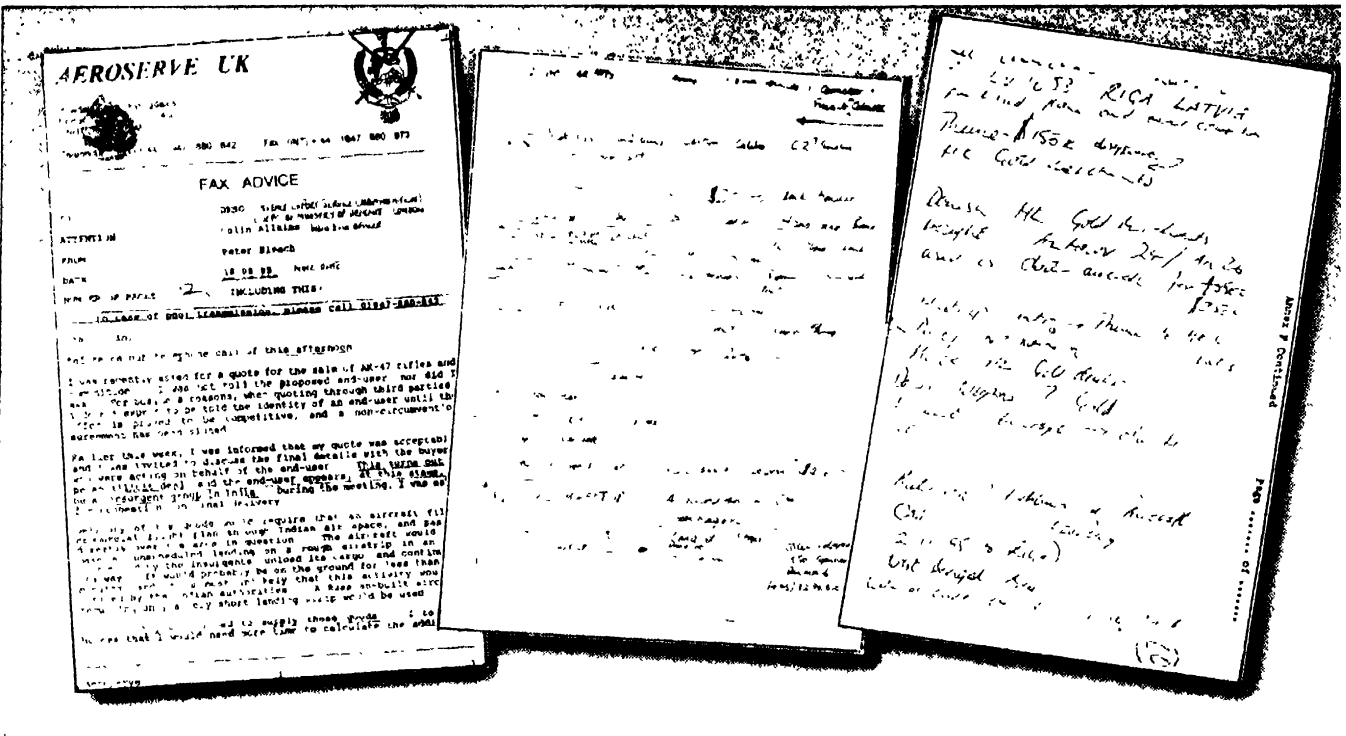
including one armyman, in which they have said that the officers had already left for the spot by the time they had reached the police stations at 6.30 am to report the incident. "The FIR is liable to be quashed only on this ground," says Prahladka.

Besides, Prahladka states that the name of the first informant was never recorded by the Jhalda PS and that the first informant of the Jaipur PS has never been produced in court.

THE LANDING

The CBI has also been charged for lying to the court about the reasons for ordering the plane to land at Bombay airport.

THE PURULIA DOCUMENTARY: tell-tale evidence



Bleach's fax to DESO, informing the authorities about a conspiracy to drop arms in Purulia

The handwritten notes of Detective Sergeant Elcock: Bleach gave him details of the conspiracy

Notes taken by the North Yorkshire Police during their third meeting with Bleach in December, 1995

admitted in court seem to vindicate SUNDAY's observations and spell out how the CBI has tried to defraud a court of law.

THE DAY AFTER

Show-cause notices have been served on P.K. Mitra and Jiban Chakrabarty, officers-in-charge of Jhalda and Jaipur police stations in Purulia respectively, in whose jurisdictions the arms fell on the night of 17 December 1995.

In the charge-sheet filed by the CBI, which forms the basis of the charges against Bleach and the Latvians, the two police officers are stated to have said that they first came to know of the incident at 8.10 am the following day and rushed to the spot immediately.

Prahladka has pointed out to the court that the claims are false. He has cited the depositions by prosecution witnesses,

The AN-26B transport plane which allegedly dropped arms over Purulia had flown in from Bulgaria on 17.12.95 after a brief halt at Karachi. In India, it refuelled at Varanasi, and took off for Yangon, flying the designated path, R460. While over Gaya, the plane is said to have deviated from R460, flown low over Purulia, dropped crates full of arms, and returned to its designated course. It then headed for Yangon, but was refused permission to land, and hence came back to touch down at Calcutta. There, it refuelled, and took off for Phuket in Thailand in the early hours of 18.12.95.

On its way back, the plane was cleared by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) to fly the Phuket-Calcutta-Varanasi-Karachi route. But it changed its flight plan and flew to Madras instead. And from there it took off for Karachi.

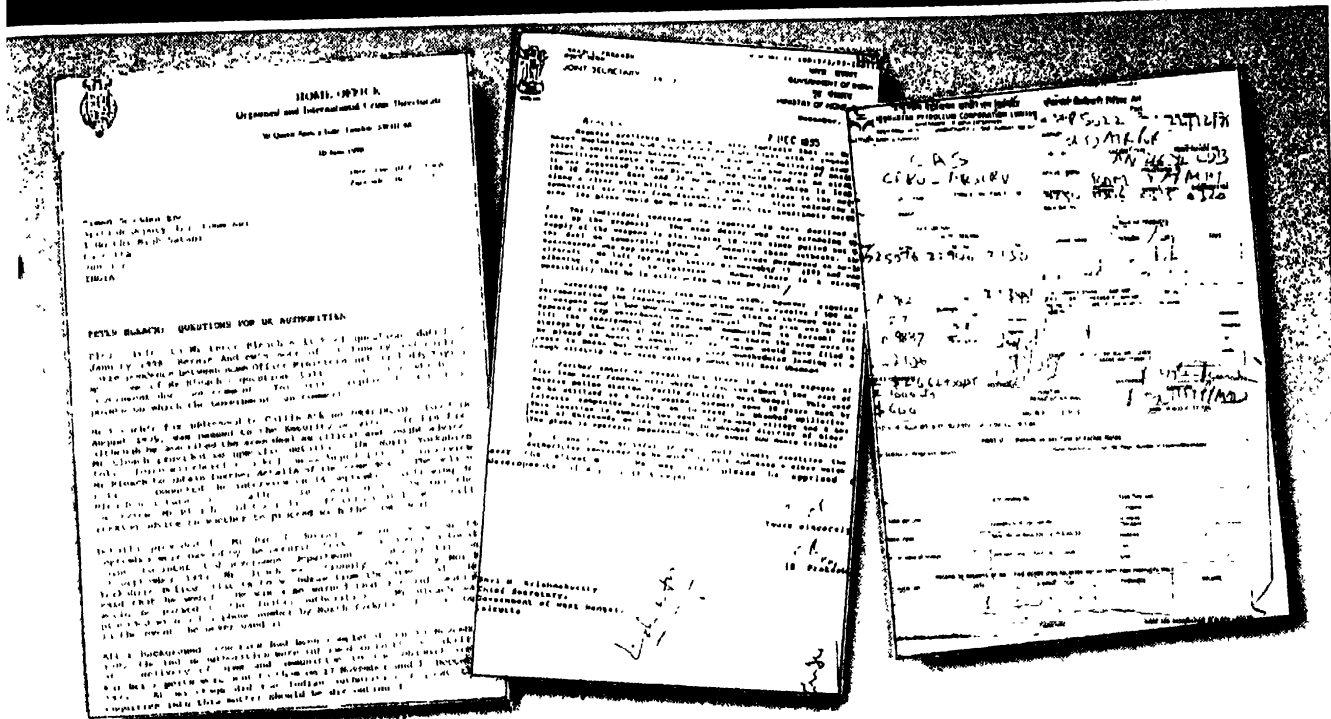
The plane flew without a hitch till it approached Bombay, when the pilot got a message from the civil air traffic control (ATC), ordering it to land at Sahar Airport.

The CBI has claimed in its charge-sheet that "during investigation the aircraft responsible for this dropping could be traced and it could be identified that an AN-26 aircraft having call sign YLLDB was flown over the sky of Jhalda P.S. on the night of 17/18-12-95 at the aforesaid time while it was coming from Varanasi to Calcutta. After identification of the aircraft, all the Military Liaison Units (MLU) in the airports all over the country were alerted and were advised to look out for the said aircraft."

on the tarmac in Bombay to enable it to take off for Karachi. The CBI concocted its story about the landing, feels Prahladka, to implicate Bleach after Davy managed to give everybody the slip.

And how — assuming their version to be true — did the investigators manage to identify the plane?

Debabrata Thakur, then the DSP CID, West Bengal, testified on oath: "On 22/12/95 I along with DIG CID West Bengal went to Calcutta airport to make enquiry whether any non-scheduled cargo aircraft had landed in Calcutta on 18/12/95." Thakur then went on to say that they ascertained from the AMLU that an AN-26 with registration number YLLDB had



British home office letter to Bleach:
India was first informed on 10 November 1995

Indian home ministry letter informing the government of West Bengal: It knew about the plan

The refuelling receipt: yet, the AN-26 (YLLDB) was very nearly let off from Bombay on 22.12.95

Prosecution witnesses from Madras airport have, however, told the court that they had received no alert from the MLUs. And if in Bombay the MLU wanted the plane to land, it was for a reason other than Purulia.

Sarad Kumar Rastogi, who was posted as watch supervisory officer that night, has told the court: "I enquired about the reason why the MLU asked the aircraft to land at Bombay. The MLU reported that the aircraft had failed to follow the prescribed route as specified by the DGCA."

Yet, the CBI charge-sheet claims that MLUs in airports all over the country had been alerted about the plane's links with Purulia. Obviously, one of the two sides is lying. In fact, Prahladka has told the court that the investigators had no inkling of the plane's involvement in the Purulia incident till Bleach gave them the story. In fact, the plane was refuelled as it stood

landed in Calcutta at around mid-night on 18.12.95 and that it was indeed a non-scheduled flight. Thakur said that they had also learnt that the plane had passed over Purulia at about 2300 hour on 17.12.95, and that the same flight had been forced to land at Bombay.

Yet, when cross-examined by Bleach, Thakur said he had no "materials to show" that the plane had passed over Purulia that day. "But," he added, "from conversation, I gathered the same."

Thakur said he had spoken to the director, aerodromes, Calcutta airport, and also to officers of the AMLU. The gentlemen had told him that they had come to know from radar readings that the plane had passed over Purulia. Thakur, however, did not record their statements.

In his petition, Prahladka makes this out to be a cock-

'There's a high-level cover-up in both countries'

Feels Tory MP Teddy Taylor

SUNDAY met Teddy Taylor at his 7 Milbank office a few days after the City Civil and Sessions Court in Calcutta directed petitioner Deepak Prahladka to despatch summons to Sergeant Stephen Leslie Elcock of the New Yorkshire Special Branch. The portly old man was all too eager to talk about Peter Bleach in the light of this latest development. Excerpts:

SUNDAY: What is your reaction to this court order?

Sir Teddy Taylor: This court order, of which I learnt just minutes before you came via a fax from Peter, is just what we needed. It vindicates our faith in the courts of India which are supposed to be independent and impartial. Now, I will do all that I can to put pressure on the home office to come out with the truth. I will raise the issue in the House and take up the matter with Jack Straw. The home office owes an explanation to the people of both countries.



Peter Bleach: friend or foe?

Q: This really does put the home office in a spot...

A: Yes. This comes a year after Jack Straw wrote to me explaining that "the discrepancy between the copy sent to the Indian authorities and the copy sent to Mr Bleach was the result of nothing more than a clerical error by the police in this country".

It appals to me how the home secretary could be advised that the fabricated document, which amounts to tampering of evidence, was just a 'clerical error'. After Sgt Elcock's deposition before the Calcutta court, I had asked Jack Straw to explain the government's position, but he is yet to reply.

[Note: Three days later, Straw did reply to the points raised by Taylor. He "stressed that the Security Service's involvement in this case was peripheral and that there has been nothing to hide. It is simply normal practice to remove passing references to the Security Service from a document of this sort...to avoid unnecessary and irrelevant supplementary questions" and went on to add that "it is a long-standing government practice not to comment on operations that may have been mounted by the Security

and Intelligence Service...I am yet to see any evidence of wrongdoing by any of the United Kingdom agencies involved in this case".

Sir Taylor referred to this reply as "hopelessly inadequate".]

Q: Is Peter Bleach the victim of a high-level conspiracy?

A: It is a conspiracy by the British government, and the Indian government, not to allow the facts of the case to

reach the court in Calcutta, to ensure that Peter hangs. No government wants to admit that it was engaged in undercover work.

Q: Who is this mysterious William Johnson?

A: I have no idea. That is what we need to find out. I have been constantly asking the home secretary about the MI6 connection to this case. But he refuses to refer to it.

Q: Are you convinced that Bleach is not guilty?

A: I have known Peter for over 15 years now. He has been involved in a number of unusual projects in various parts of the world. But he has always told me the truth and there is no reason for me to believe that he is not speaking the truth now. Peter is not guilty and it will be most unfortunate, it will be a shame, if he was to be sentenced. I will do all that I can, politically, to try and prevent that. But there is a high-level cover-up at the government level, in fact in both governments, for which they want Peter to hang. •

Sumit Das Gupta/London

and-bull story and has accused Thakur of wilfully lying to the court. He says his suspicions were aroused by the statements of D.N. Ghosh, deputy director, aerodrome, and in-charge of air traffic control, Calcutta Airport. Ghosh had said: "We had only one terminal radar facility for the purpose of landing and taking off. We do not have any enroute radar and this radar facility is only available for the purpose of landing." Surely, a landing radar could not have spotted a plane over Purulia! Which radar, then, is Thakur talking about?

Prahladka has also argued that had the AMLU at Calcutta known about the plane's detour from radar readings, the aircraft would have been impounded at Calcutta, and not allowed to proceed to Phuket.

THE ARREST

The CBI has also been charged with lying about the arrest of the accused in Bombay. The Constitution is categorical that a detained person must be produced in court within 24 hours of being apprehended. But Bleach and the Latvians, according to Prahladka, had been produced in court after 56 hours.

The charge-sheet states that they were arrested on 23.12.95 and produced in court on 24.12.95 at about 1.30 pm. This is a deliberate lie, Prahladka has pointed out. He has shown that, by the CBI's own admission in the same charge-sheet, Bleach and the Latvians had been "detained by the Immigration Deptt" at Bombay airport "soon after landing of the aircraft". And that, Prahladka figures out, was at around 3 am on 22.12.95. He, however, argues that their detention has actually begun the moment the plane landed at 1.39 am in compliance with the ATC order.

Besides, he has cited gross anomalies in the deposition of DSP CID Debabrata Thakur, who seems unable to make up his mind on what he did when. Here is how he tied himself up in knots while being examined and cross-examined:

- "I interrogated Bleach and Latvians on 23.12.95 between 11-45 hours to 15-00 hours."
- "After interrogation of those accused persons I arrested those accused persons viz Klichine Alexander, Gaidache Oleg, Moskvitin Igor, Timmerman Igor, Antimenko and Peter James Bleach."
- "I arrested Bleach and Latvians on 23.12.95 at 12-30 hours."

If all that sounds a bit wonky, here's a teaser: when were these men actually arrested? On 24.12.95, and that too, after obtaining remand from the Bombay court. There is no room for speculation as far as this date is concerned.

The arrest memo issued by Thakur to each of the arrested, duly signed by Thakur himself, the detainee and a witness, bears that indelible date.

"Clearly," Prahladka told SUNDAY, "Thakur had lied to the court in Bombay as well."

THE INFORMER

It has now become clear that the CBI charge-sheet and the trial so far have been based on the suppression of a fact most crucial to the case: that Peter Bleach had informed the British authorities at frequent intervals about a criminal conspiracy by Kim Davy and his associates in Denmark to drop arms in Purulia. SUNDAY had brought this to light two years back (*Our*

'There is no cover-up, no conspiracy'

Says Sgt Stephen Elcock

Sgt Stephen Leslie Elcock. Smart conspirator or stooge of the security services in UK and/or India? Top cop or a bumbling fool? The answers that emerged out of a brief telephonic conversation with SUNDAY were hardly flattering for the Special Branch officer with the North Yorkshire Police. Elcock's dogged defiance suggested that he holds a strict brief to parrot a few fixed lines and leave the rest to the powers that be. Excerpts:

SUNDAY: Have you received word about the recent court order summoning you to Calcutta?

Sgt Stephen Leslie Elcock: What? What was that?

Q: The sessions court in Calcutta has issued a show-cause notice as to why criminal proceedings should not be initiated against you for tampering with evidence in the Purulia case.

A: I have no idea of that. I have received nothing yet...(mobile disconnected).

Q: But it's becoming increasingly clear that a high-level conspiracy in both countries has attempted to mislead the court.

A: No. There is no cover-up, no conspiracy.

Q: What about the altered documents relating to your meeting with Bleach?

A: The alterations were clerical errors and surely clerical errors cannot be a criminal offence.

Q: On 17 February, during cross-examination, you admitted that you had made the changes under instructions from the "security services"...

A: I repeat there has been no impropriety. The evidence has been presented to the court in the correct form. The documents were not tampered with. All this talk is just mischief-making.

Sunil Das Gupta/London

Story, 5—11 January, 1997), and now the court has taken cognizance on the basis of Prahladka's petition.

Documents produced as evidence before the court incontrovertibly prove that Bleach had informed the Defence Exports Service Organisation (DESO), a wing of the British defence ministry, about the conspiracy. In a faxed message, dated 18.8.95, to Collin Allkins at the DESO India desk, Bleach had given a graphic account of what was in the offing.

Allkins had passed the information on to what he refers to as "appropriate authorities", and Detective Sergeant S.L. Elcock of the North Yorkshire Police Special Branch met Bleach at his North Yorkshire residence on 14.9.95.

It has now become known that the police acted on the basis of a telex note from someone whose name has been expunged from the copy that the CBI has produced as evidence.

Legal eagle

Deepak Prahladka is committed to fighting corruption in courtrooms

Deepak Kumar Prahladka, 37, is a crusader against judicial fraud. He doesn't have any law degree, but that hasn't deterred Prahladka from intervening in important cases in which he found false evidence was being given to mislead the courts. One such case involves a former judge of the Calcutta High Court, Ajit Sengupta, who was pulled up for FERA violations. And now his intervention in the Purulia case has put the CBI in a spot.

Prahladka chanced to meet Peter Bleach and the Latvians in Calcutta's Presidency Jail in May last year, when the then Chief Justice of Calcutta High Court Prabha Shankar Mishra packed him off to the high-security prison on contempt charges. Prahladka had accused the Chief Justice of abusing his power. Supreme Court, however, stayed the sentence and has taken up the matter for hearing.

During the 36 days that he was in jail before the apex



PHOTO: SANJAY

Deepak Prahladka: one-man army

court bailed him out, Prahladka got access to papers produced as evidence in court and discovered gross anomalies that he felt amounted to falsification. Once out of jail, he filed a series of petitions accusing the CBI and its key witnesses of trying to defraud the court.

"There are many people fighting against political, administrative and environmental pollution, but I am the only crusader against pollution in Indian judiciary, particularly in West Bengal courts," Prahladka told SUNDAY. •

At that meeting, Bleach repeated to Elcock all that he had earlier told Allkins, and the detective sergeant took handwritten notes of all that he was told. Those notes were later sent to the Calcutta court by the North Yorkshire Police through the Bow Street Magistrate's Court in London following a letter rogatory sent by the court in Calcutta. They now form part of the evidence.

Elcock testified before the court in February this year that

he had indeed met Bleach on 14.9.95 and that the handwritten notes were his. It has also been proved that Elcock had sent a handwritten report of that interview to the British Secret Service, better known as the MI5.

The Special Branch officer met Bleach twice subsequently — on 22.9.95 and 8.12.95, though Bleach disputes the date of the second. And, as before, Elcock filed reports of the interview to the Secret Service.

Information given by Bleach was then passed on to the Government of India. In a letter to Bleach, G.W. MacAlister, an officer in the British home office, has stated that the information was first given to the Indian government on 10 November 1995. This was followed by further despatches on 17 November and 15 December that year.

That explains the contents of a letter written by Sashi Prakash, an additional secretary in the Union home ministry (*What happened in Purulia?*, SUNDAY, 1—7 December, 1996). Despite having been tipped off by the British authorities on 10 November 1995, Sashi Prakash waited for 32 days before sending a letter by registered post to the government of West Bengal (which reached after the incident), alerting the state.

The information contained in that letter, dated 12 December 1995, is clearly a close repetition of all that Bleach had told DESO and, later, the North Yorkshire Police. Thus, it's evident that the prior information that Government of India had received actually came from Peter Bleach.

Did Sashi Prakash inform the Indian Air Force? Did he inform the DGCA? Did he file an FIR after being informed by the British authorities? In a separate petition, Prahladka has pleaded that Sashi Prakash should be impleaded in the case for criminal negligence of duty. The court, however, has ruled that only the Government of India can take appropriate action against Sashi Prakash. Prahladka, however, has decided to move Calcutta High Court against this order.

The CBI had known all this ever since they took over the case on 27.12.95. Bleach has been consistent in saying that he had given the CBI a detailed account of the events leading up to the arms drop, but his statement, according to Bleach, had been suppressed. Later, he wanted make a statement before the court, but the CBI raised objections. And, in any case, the CBI cannot feign ignorance, as the tell-tale documents were in their hands long before its officers sat down to frame the charges.

DETECTIVE SERGEANT ELCOCK

And in trying to suppress this crucial information which would have made Bleach the main informer and prime witness instead of the prime accused in the case, Prahladka has pointed out that the CBI tampered with some of the documents produced as evidence.

For example, parts of the telex message asking the North Yorkshire Police to get in touch with Bleach and seek information about the conspiracy have been blocked out. So it is difficult to gather from the copy produced as evidence as to whom the message was being sent and by who.

Secondly, the first and the last paragraphs of the handwritten report sent by Elcock have been similarly deleted. This came to light when the British authorities sent to Bleach copies of the papers forwarded by the North Yorkshire Police to the court. The copies didn't match, and Prahladka has claimed in his petition that the document had been doctored.

Elcock's report after his first interview with Bleach: the copy given to the court (right) has the first and last paragraphs missing. The original (left) has the full text. Who doctored the document and why?

While being cross-examined by Bleach, Detective Sergeant Elcock testified that portions of his report had been redacted to withhold the identity of the Secret Service officer to whom it was sent. And the very next day, he changed his version to say that it was a "photocopy error".

What is more, the North Yorkshire Police had listed 73 items that were sent to the court. The CBI had taken from the court the sealed box containing the documents for examination, and returned them in due course. But when it was opened in court during Elcock's examination, it was found to contain 75 pieces.

The two surreptitious entrants were the reports of Elcock's second and third meetings with Bleach. These documents had not been listed but their typed copies managed to surface in court. And they did without the signature of the exhibit officer of the North Yorkshire Police or any date beneath Elcock's own signature.

Elcock offered a lengthy and somewhat laboured explanation to clarify how that could have had happened. But Prahladka has accused him of giving false evidence and Justice P.K. Biswas has seen eye to eye.

"I suspect that the two documents were falsely fabricated by the CBI and later endorsed by Elcock," Prahladka told SUNDAY. "And that is also probably the reason why the report is all mixed up about the date of Elcock's second meeting with Bleach," a discrepancy that Prahladka has pointed out to the court. Significantly, in his second report, Elcock has claimed that he had advised Bleach to steer clear of the deal.

PETER TO THUNE

Bleach did distance himself from the deal. He put Davy in touch with Border Technologies and Innovation (BTI), a British firm dealing in armaments, and it was BTI that supplied

the arms and ammunitions to Davy. Bleach for his part scouted for aircraft and spotted one in Latvia. It was purchased by Carol Air Services, which signed a contract with the members of the crew. Bleach remained in the background, imagining all along that the information provided by him was being acted upon and would help bust a major gang of illegal arms dealers and gold smugglers.

But the Indian authorities took no step to arrest Davy when the plane landed at Varanasi before dropping arms in Purulia. And, later, when Davy disappeared without a trace from Bombay's Sahar Airport, the authorities decided to fix Bleach and the Latvians.

To prove Bleach's complicity, the CBI produced a letter written by one Peter to a man called Brian Thune, one of Davy's Danish associates. The letter is incriminating insofar as Peter tells Thune about his Indian contacts preparing the ground for the airdrop in Purulia. The CBI has described the letter as one written by Peter Bleach to Brian Thune.

But Prahladka has nailed the lie by citing the deposition of Joseph Ponnolly, CBI's own expert who had retrieved the letter from a laptop computer found in the plane in Bombay. He testified that the computer belonged to Davy and the letter had been written by him. Prahladka's petition pertaining to this fraud has implicated Lokenath Behra, the CBI sleuth.

In the light of so many instances of false evidence given before the court, Prahladka has appealed for the quashing of the charges against Bleach and the Latvians and the dismissal of the case. Significantly, Justice Biswas has not snubbed the petition; instead, he has adjourned its hearing to a later date.

Prahladka says he has done his bit to ease the flow of justice by spotting the lies that created a cesspool. And it is now for the judge to decide the course he should take. •

Anish Gupta with Sourabh Sen and Soumen Dutta/Calcutta and Sumit Das Gupta/London

Banking On Corporates

Market-savvy transnational banks now emerge as travel managers for business houses

If you are an executive in any corporate house, you must be familiar with the business of travelling. And if your venture is business related, the employer has to shell out the dough. Briefly, travel and entertainment (T&E) expenses are inevitable, being inherent and indispensable features of any executive's job profile.

With the opening up of the Indian economy and the resulting competitiveness, corporates are sensing the need to be close to their customers and suppliers, both domestic and international. Result: T&E expenses are multiplying, becoming a major cost headache. This is where another set of corporates — the transnational banks — come in, promising to save their customer's money by as much as 25 per cent per annum. And, actually doing it.

But how? Through corporate cards, which free corporate houses from dealing with major headaches like cash advances to the executive and auditing. To add to that are the obvious benefits of bulk purchase. The market-savvy banks are also offering attractive incentives to their clients in the form of value-added services.

Atul Mathur, head of American Express Travel Services Group, says, "We're using the 'savings' proposition. That's our USP." What he means, in simple terms, is that they are helping clients save money. Behind this claim is a market survey of India's corporate T&E management practices. Based on a report covering over 600 senior manage-

ment contacts in 400 companies across India, AmEx makes recommendations for better T&E management. Commenting on the survey findings, Gregor Lochtie, director, Consulting Services, American Express, Asia Pacific & Australia, says: "Although the majority of companies agree that T&E expenditure is an extremely critical cost, there is limited implementation of proven business travel management practices that can control and manage these costs better."



FACTS AND FIGURES

- An average Indian company spent about Rs 1.65 crore on T&E in 1997
- Indian companies rank T&E as the second-largest controllable expense
- Sixty-six per cent of the companies covered by the survey expect an increase in T&E spending
- Sixty per cent have formal written travel policies
- Travellers in only 12 per cent receive a copy of the travel policy
- Eleven per cent of the companies that have a written travel policy communicate it through word of mouth
- Only 24 per cent maximise savings opportunities by requiring travellers to make reservations in hotels with which the companies have negotiated rates
- Only 56 per cent of the companies that issue a corporate card require use of the card for all chargeable business expenses
- Eighty-three per cent use temporary card advances to fund T&E expenditure



In India, corporate travel is growing at 10 per cent per annum. The market could be worth US\$ 3 billion by 2000

The banks seem to have hit upon a really bright idea that does two things at one stroke: make money for them and save the client's too. The potential of this market can be judged from the following facts:

- Business travel is worth US\$ 400 billion worldwide today.
- One out of every 12 jobs is travel-related.
- In India, too, corporate travel business is growing at 10 per cent per annum.
- The market could be worth US\$ 3 billion by 2000.

The survey reveals that T&E is rank-

ed the second-largest controllable expense after salaries. This means the average annual T&E expenditure is higher than annual spending for data processing, taxes, or advertising. On an average, the amount spent on it per year is Rs 1.65 crore, though a dramatic increase of 66 per cent is a realistic possibility. While one-third of it is on international travel, many companies are not implementing proven business travel management practices to manage and control T&E costs better.

The survey findings confirm the belief that corporations in India are not fully leveraging the process and purchase savings opportunities on their

T&E expenses. In the light of the findings, AmEx has drawn up several recommendations and a disciplined approach which can result in savings of up to Rs 2,500 crore annually for corporate India. "And that's a conservative estimate," adds Mathur. Banks are now donning the role of a consultant, product and service provider: a three-in-one package deal for corporate travel management.

Behind this unusual positioning strategy of business travel management and neatly intertwined into the banks' recommendations is the idea of using the corporate card to pay for all chargeable T&E expenses. "For the corporate, this means doing away with cash advances — an administrative burden. It also causes a negative flow of funds. The corporate card can help track expense patterns, thus helping the company to better define its T&E budget," explains V. Krishnan, manager, corporate communications, Standard Chartered, India.

Corporates are looking for such experts today. And, considering the rapid growth in this segment, they don't have to wait too long. This indirect way of promoting corporate cards, the hottest item in its corporate services basket, is finding its takers. Says Vibha Paul Rishi, executive director, PepsiCo India, "We are very satisfied with our AmEx corporate card programme. It is functioning smoothly." Adds Mathur: "We have made significant investments in technology and training towards delivering similar benefits to the Indian corporations." AmEx offers a full range of corporate services comprising corporate card system, business travel, forex and consulting services. Over 4,000 corporations have signed on the AmEx corporate card. The card system links up all the cards issued in a corporation even when they are spread across different cities, departments or locations. For the corporate traveller, using a card offers the advantages of a widely accepted payment vehicle, support services, and generation of receipts for expense reports.

Corporates use their power of negotiation (as a result of bulk buying) to swing better deals with travel related services. For instance, hotel representatives have expressed the desire to offer special deals, say in the area of a single day (no night stay) service.

A case study: an Australian company's total T&E expense was to the tune of US\$ 1,86,000. The company was using multiple agents, indulging in mul-

multiple payment methods and had not negotiated any special rates. AmEx's recommendations were a written travel policy, one agent, negotiated rates, corporate card and elimination of invoices. Result: the company saved 23 per cent.

The benefits to executives are obvious. There is financial flexibility due to no pre-set spending limit, wide acceptance, emergency card replacement, insurance protection and limited loss liability.

Each of the four phases of the business travel management process — travel policy, travel arrangements, payment methods and expense processing — offers opportunities for companies to control T&E costs. Travel policy provides an opportunity to purchase tickets and accommodation at negotiated or discounted rates. In India, comprehensive travel policies are rare and their distribution is limited. Compliance objectives will not be met without proper communication and distribution of the policy. Specifying a payment method allows companies to streamline expense processing, correct errors or non-compliant activity. Companies can rely on payment methods that maximise cash retention, minimise indirect costs, provide information, promote prompt expense reporting and encourage documentation discipline. By not developing effective business travel management programmes, they are missing out on these key control opportunities.

Corporate cards are issued to benefit from streamlined expense processing and to receive critical management information. Survey results indicate that they are gradually emerging as a method to fund T&E expenditure as companies streamline payment methods. Four of the top five criteria used to select a corporate card relate directly to the traveller's

Corporate cards free business houses from dealing with a major headache like cash advances to the executive

convenience. But only 52 per cent of companies that issue corporate cards require that employees use the card for all chargeable business expenses.

"The liability in case of business expenses lies with the corporate. For his personal expenses, the individual is liable," explains an official from Citibank. But reliance on cash advances remains

high even though cash advances are the most costly T&E payment method.

Expense processing is the final step in the travel management process. Often this step is a time-consuming administrative burden for both travellers and programme administrators.

One would expect travel agencies to be affected by this new trend of banks emerging as travel experts. Is this an encroachment? Disagrees Dhruv Mukherjee, marketing manager, Northern India, Sita Travels. He says: "We welcome such trends. These policies complement our functions. It's a global trend. In fact, agencies may promote their own plastic to corporate clients. We may tread that path in the future."

Corporate plastic is destined to travel a fair distance for one simple reason. While it seems to be making everyone happy, no dissenting voice feels that banking on it may boomerang. •

Devdatta Das/New Delhi

HOW TO CUT COSTS

- Set goals for travel management
- Negotiate corporate rate programmes
- Consolidate travel purchasing through a single travel agency
- Minimise use of cash advance and direct invoicing
- Rely on corporate card programme
- Audit only a sample of expense reports
- Analyse and use spend data that may already exist
- Measure the costs of expense processing

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Proxy war

Efforts to revive Indo-Pak ties seem to be foundering



Few international relationships can be so fragile as that between this country and Pakistan. Soon after the historic bus ride by Atal Behari Vajpayee to Lahore, that gave a tremendous boost to the peace process, the bilateral relations have once again taken a turn for the worse. Some have indeed begun to wonder whether the Lahore spirit may be as prone to evaporate as the earlier ones generated at Tashkent in 1966 and in Shimla six years later. However, it is small mercy that both New Delhi and Islamabad are still trying to prevent the Lahore agenda from collapsing altogether.

Of the nagging problems that have arisen, the least troublesome is the postponement by Pakistan of the integrated negotiations scheduled for June. Islamabad cannot be blamed for taking the position that talks should better be held when New Delhi has a duly-elected government. There is indeed deep irony in this. Through most of the last half-a-century, a stable and vigorously democratic India used to scoff at Pakistan which was either precariously unstable or under military dictatorship.

Now the boot is on the other leg. Nawaz Sharif's government enjoys a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly. In India, three governments have changed in three years. And a fourth is in the offing. It is no secret that Pakistanis would prefer to do business with Vajpayee. If they are given a vote in September elections here, they would flock to the BJP booth. But they are not sure whether Atalji will be back. So they are waiting until after the polls.

Vastly more troubling are two other developments which might have attracted more serious attention but for the all-absorbing Congress crisis caused by Sonia Gandhi's resignation. The Gestapo-like arrest and detention of the prominent Pakistani journalist Najam Sethi has caused deep dismay and resentment to not only media persons in this country but also to all those committed to the cause of Indo-Pak friendship.

Clearly, Sethi's lecture in the Indian capital had less to do with his ordeal than his help to the BBC to make a documentary on corruption, especially by the Sharif family. Even so, the ISI (working in tandem with the Sharif government) wants to make an example of Sethi to deter criticism of their country by Pakistanis on "Indian soil". Nobody is surprised by ISI's bestial ways. But the reputation of the usually suave and soft-spoken Pakistani high commissioner in Delhi, Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, has plummeted. His description of Sethi's speech as "contemptible treachery" has not gone down well.

Indian journalists and liberals who have been demonstrating here against the imprisonment of Sethi and other Pakistani newsmen should realise, however, that support and sympathy for any suffering Pakistani by Indians can worsen his plight manifold. This sadly bespeaks of the underlying mindset in Islamabad.

The second and more disturbing development is the renewal of Pakistani trans-border support to terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir with the melting of the snows. Kargil and Gras sectors are the main targets of the malign Pakistani army action to give cover to infiltrating foreign militants. At the time of writing, heavy exchange of artillery firing has been



Nawaz Sharif with A.B. Vajpayee

going on for more than a week. Over 350 militants who had succeeded in coming in are being killed and rounded up, but the operation, perhaps the largest in a decade, has caused casualties to Indian security forces too. The danger of both sides upping the ante is real.

Even at the height of the euphoria over Lahore no one had expected that Pakistan would let up on its proxy war in Jammu and Kashmir. But there is such a thing as overdoing something one might have got away with in the past.

In this context, a recent speech by Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, General Pervez Musharraf, which has received scant attention in this country, merits careful notice. His elaborate hawkish rhetoric apart, he told the English Speaking Union in Karachi on 13 April that the "resolution of the Kashmir issue will not be the end of the matter (India-Pakistan confrontation)." For, according to him, India wants to "weaken us, splinter us not through direct approach but through low-intensity conflict..." What a negation this is of the standard Pakistani position that a "fair" settlement of the "core" issue of Kashmir is all that is needed to usher in an era of Indo-Pak friendship and cooperation! •

"The resolution of the Kashmir issue will not be the end of the matter [Indo-Pak confrontation]," said Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, General Musharraf

Carrying Sonia'

Siddhartha Shankar Ray returns to politics — and defends the dynasty in its hour of crisis

Mrs Indira Gandhi's Man Friday is back at a time when her daughter-in-law needs him the most. After three years of political hibernation, Siddhartha Shankar Ray has announced to contest the forthcoming general elections: the 78-year-old Congress stalwart from West Bengal will stand from the 'Calcutta north-west' constituency, if his party agrees to field him. This will be his second attempt to enter the Parliament after his return from America — where he served as India's ambassador to the United States.

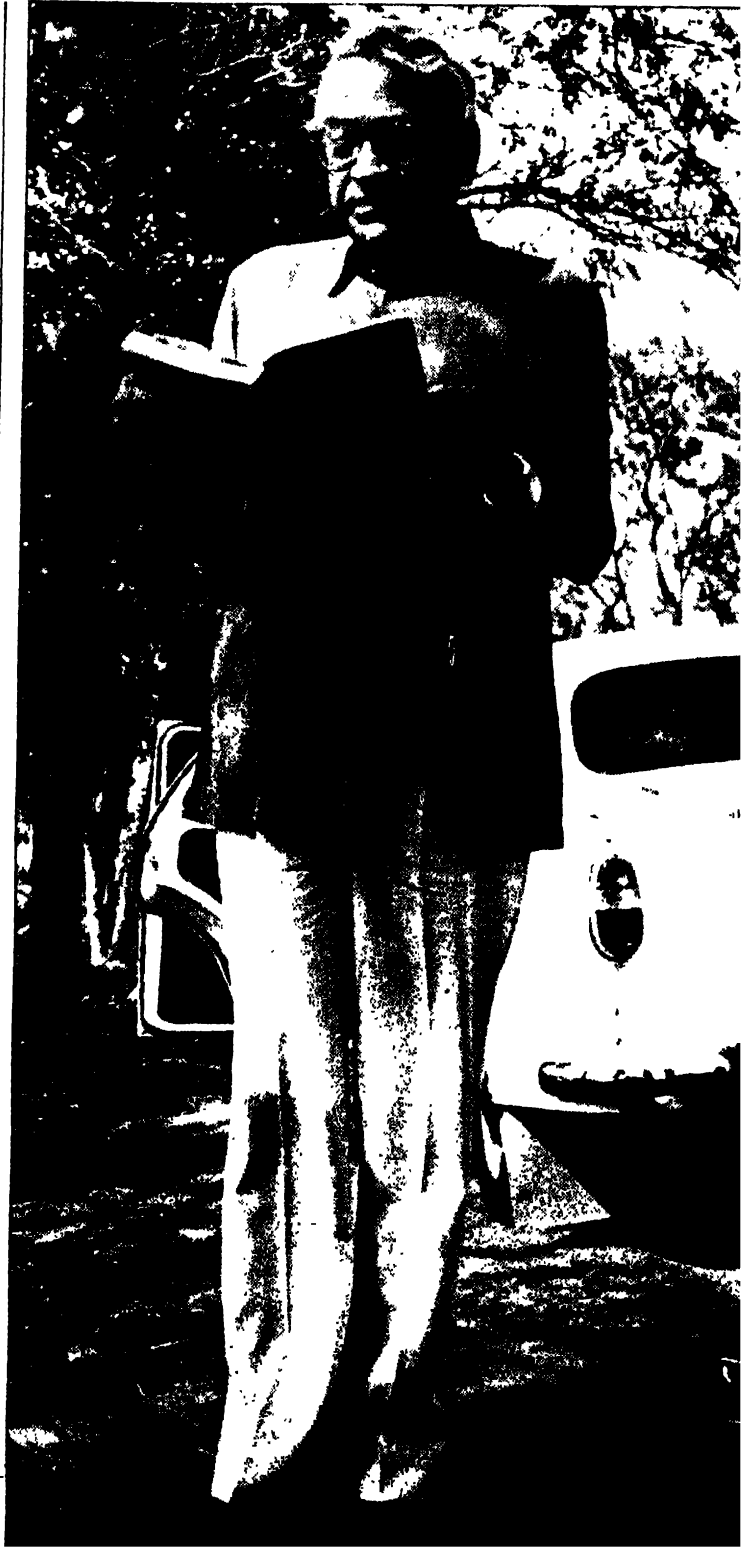
In the 1996 elections, Ray was defeated from the Behrampore constituency in West Bengal. State Congressmen, however, feel that the second time will be lucky for him. Seeing the activities in and around 20 Beltolla Road, the Ray residence in south Calcutta, one feels the West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee (WBPPCC) has already made up its mind to nominate Ray as candidate for the 'Calcutta north-west' seat and is now waiting for the party high command to give the green signal. In the 1998 parliamentary elections, this seat was won by the Trinamul Congress leader Sudip Bandyopadhyay.

This time, Bandyopadhyay is a doubtful starter. And the PCC wants to make the best of the situation. Given the low morale of the party workers after the revolt in the Congress, the WBPPCC badly needs a candidate close to the Gandhi dynasty to make its presence felt among Calcuttans. And who else in the present Congress set-up is better than Ray? An eminent barrister and a close associate of Indira Gandhi, Ray has had a chequered career: he's been the chief minister of West Bengal, a Union minister, the governor of Punjab and India's ambassador to the US.

Last fortnight, WBPPCC president Barkat Ghani Khan Chowdhury, working-president Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, former PCC chief Somen Mitra and many other senior leaders called on Ray requesting him to contest the polls. "It'll boost the morale of the Congress. He has a secular image and this will go down well with the Muslims in the constituency," said PCC vice-president and MLA Saugata Roy.

"I have been a Congressman for ages. It's natural for me to come to party's aid at its hour of crisis. I met Sonia Gandhi a few days back and I told her that I would campaign for the party. And now, if the Congress wants me to contest, I am ready. I am a champion of secularism and will always defend it."

SIDDHARTHA SHANKAR RAY: *The man of the hour*



s Brief

Meanwhile, Ray's decision has opened a Pandora's box. Instead of boosting the party's sagging morale, his detractors say, Ray's comeback would only create problems. Ray's entry, they feel, would provide ammunition to the Left Front — who have a strong antipathy towards him. "In the electoral campaign, the Left would dig up the past and give currency to the slogan: 'exterminator of the Naxals', a sobriquet that has been used time and again by the CPI(M) to neutralise the state Congress," said a Congress leader.

What's more, Ray's entry would also jeopardise the delicate balance of power in the faction-ridden PCC. Ray's remark that Priya Ranjan Das Munshi would make a better PCC chief than Ghani Khan Chowdhury was an affront to the latter. And Chowdhury told reporters that all his good work was being demeaned by Ray. The PCC president believes that Ray was deliberately creating problems in

The founding-fathers of the Indian Constitution were no fools, argues S.S. Ray, they were learned men and had studied other Constitutions in detail before writing out the Indian one. "And for God's sake, don't talk about constitutional amendment. The less you touch the Constitution, the better it is for the nation," he added

the Congress. But actually the trouble lies elsewhere.

It's well-known that Ray doesn't see eye to eye with Pranab Mukherjee, a powerful Congress leader from West Bengal. In the last few years, Pranab Mukherjee has consolidated his position in the PCC and virtually controls the party with the assistance of Somen Mitra and his mentor Barkat Ghani Khan Chowdhury. This has caused resentment in the party rank and file, especially among the supporters of Das Munshi and Subroto Mukherjee, the state INTUC chief and MLA.

So, Ray's comeback poses a direct threat to Pranab Mukherjee. It will not only weaken Mukherjee's control over the PCC, but it would also mean no-holds-barred drive to bring back Trinamul Congress chief Mamata Banerjee into the fold. It's an open secret that Ray, like Das Munshi and Mukherjee, wants Mamata to be rehabilitated into the party much to the chagrin of the Pranab loyalists.

Finally, Ray also has to contend with former Congress parliamentarian and three-times winner from the north-west constituency, Debi Pal. Immediately after Ray's announcement to contest elections from 'Calcutta north-west', Pal said that he would not leave the seat under any circumstances and would seek the intervention of the party high command.

But for the time being, the state PCC leaders have buried their knives. And a seasoned politician that Ray is, he's also playing to the tune. While placing the ball in the high command's court, Ray has started doing his bit: he has distanced himself from Mamata Banerjee and has started singing paeans for Sonia Gandhi.

"It's true that I like Mamata. It's also true that I protested when she joined hands with the BJP. But after she criticised Sonia Gandhi by openly supporting the rebels and decided to campaign with the BJP from the same platform, I could no longer support her. Everybody knows that I'm secular. And my entire being revolts against the *sangh parivar* policies," explained Ray.

Standing firmly behind Sonia Gandhi, Ray feels that the recent developments, which led to the expulsion of Sharad Pawar, P.A. Sangma and Tariq Anwar, would not weaken the Congress. "Look at the letter: it's full of contradictions. I wonder, who drafted the letter," said the noted barrister. "First they praise Sonia for revitalising the party and then they question her abilities to lead the party and the country. This is ridiculous. I do not buy the foreign origin theory. After all, somebody who has accepted the Indian ethos, traditions and values cannot be sidelined just because she's a foreigner."

The founding-fathers of the Indian Constitution were no fools, argues Ray, they were learned men and had studied other Constitutions in detail before writing out the Indian one. "And for God's sake, don't talk about constitutional amendment. The less you touch the Constitution, the better it is for the nation," he added.

But why did Pawar, Sangma and Anwar revolt? "In their letter, they have clouded their grievance with a web of words. They have accused Sonia of temporary aberration. But I think it's otherwise. They could have talked with Sonia and settled the issue. But they felt so neglected and insecure that they decided to split," reasoned Ray. "I feel, these leaders knew that Sonia was gaining in strength and after the polls, if she became Prime Minister, the troika would be left in the sidelines."

In fact, Ray makes no bones of the fact that he is out to defend Sonia. And that his close association with Indira and Rajiv is not the only reason for carrying her brief. "I've known Sonia since she came as a *bahu*. The attack against her is unwarranted. I think it's an attempt to prevent Sonia and the Congress from coming to power. Perhaps, it's a sheer coincidence that the rebels are singing the tune of the BJP. But let me tell you, Sonia is a very practical person and no one controls her. She is still the leader of the party and will be the principal campaigner for the Congress."

Indeed, Ray has always proved to be a true loyalist of the Gandhi family. He served Indira Gandhi. Rajiv respected him. And Sonia, perhaps, knows that she will need his services at this hour of crisis. •

Arindam Sarkar/Calcutta

Crisis managers

Vajpayee's new strategy has foiled attempts to tarnish his image



In the last 13 months, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has created three crisis managers in his camp who are not only loyal to him personally, but also doing

everything for his continuation as the PM. They are Pramod Mahajan, George Fernandes and P.R. Kumaramangalam. Though Jaswant Singh is also a staunch supporter of Vajpayee, he is considered more of a friend than a crisis manager.

In fact, before becoming Prime Minister, Vajpayee never ran any camp or had any loyalists in the party. He was away from factional politics. After becoming the PM, he realised that without creating his own team, he cannot cope with the pressures from within the party and outside.

Unlike other PMs, he had to fight two battles simultaneously. One with the Opposition parties and another on the home front. BJP leaders may or may not agree, but the fact is that there are people at the party headquarters who have been constantly damaging Vajpayee's image by briefing selective media persons. Several attempts were made to tarnish his image, and finally to prove him the most ineffective Prime Minister.

This perception persisted for more than six months, after which Vajpayee asserted himself and tried to create his own team as most of the top leaders in the party were not with him. He and Murli Manohar Joshi came together. Besides this, the Prime Minister brought his own loyalists (Mahajan and Singh) into the Union Cabinet. He also brought Fernandes and Kumaramangalam close to him.

The first thing that Mahajan did was to project Vajpayee's image by hook or by crook. Several allegations were made against him to convert Doordarshan into PM's loudspeaker, but he did not pay heed. This exercise worked and Vaj-



Atal Behari Vajpayee: asserting himself

payee started getting credit for government decisions which earlier individual ministers used to get.

Moreover, Mahajan airlifted OB vans to every nook and corner of the country for the PM's functions and in his candid interviews defended the Prime Minister like anything. It was his brainwave to promptly come out with an advertisement ("What wrong did he do?") in all newspapers after the fall of the government. Now this advertisement is being turned into the poster of the party for the elections.

Fernandes was used to cultivate not only the present allies but also to find out new partners. Those who pretend to be secular and cannot align with the BJP directly, joined hands indirectly by having an alliance with the Samata Party. Fernandes proved to be a link between other forces and the BJP. This helped the BJP in widening its base and enhancing

its acceptability. Otherwise, it was untouchable till last year. George is the only person who addresses Vajpayee and Advani by their first names.

Kumaramangalam is the latest entry in Atal's camp. Initially, his credentials were under question in this camp, but after his performance as parliamentary affairs minister, he earned the trust and confidence of the PM. Though he left the Congress only two years ago, today he has got the maximum number of portfolios in the BJP government. It was he and Pramod who organised 17 MPs after 18 of Jayalalitha's AIADMK deserted the coalition.

Jaswant Singh is not much involved in political affairs, but he has helped the PM on the foreign policy front. His major contribution was to bring India and the USA closer through Strobe Talbott and stop the deviation in foreign policy. •

ANDAMAN & NICOBAR

Let there be light

A tiny island in the Nicobars will receive the millennium's first sun rays



WITNESSING HISTORY: the Nicobar Islands

If you happen to be anywhere near the "developed world" this summer, there is no escaping the millennium mania. As the countdown to 2000 gathers momentum, nations are tripping over each other in the mad race to host the biggest bash on the last night of this millennium.

So, here's a millennium mind-teaser.

Q: Which place in the world will experience the First Sunrise of the New Millennium?

A: The Katchall Island, in the Nicobar group of islands, India. Yes, and there's nothing unofficial about that. Ask Dr Robin Catchpole, senior astronomer at the Royal Observatory, Greenwich, "The new millennium starts at zero hours GMT on 1 January 2000. On that basis, the first sunrise of the new millennium will be at the place where the sun is rising at that precise moment. So, the question, simply, is where is the sun rising at that instant? The answer is, Katchall Island, in the Nicobar group of islands, Bay of Bengal."

The scientist dealing with the matters of the millennium at the Royal Observatory told SUNDAY: "The International Conference held in Washington in October 1884, for the purpose of fixing a prime meridian and a universal day, resolved to

adopt the meridian at Greenwich as the prime meridian for 'all the world' and the time and day at the Greenwich meridian as the universal time and day for 'all the world'. This standard time, popularly known as GMT, forms the basis for the claim that the millennium will start at zero hours Greenwich time and that the first sunrise will be over the Indian island."

But then, why is no one aware of India's legitimate claim to a historic moment in the mega millennium experience? Why, instead, are the remote Republic of Kiribati and the tiny islands of New Zealand engaged in a tug-of-war over the 'first sunrise'? The answers probably lie somewhere between intense competition and commerce at one end and ignorance and indolence at another.

The first, of course, is the prerogative of the nations devoured by the millennium bug. "The claims of Kiribati and New Zealand are simply on the basis of local time, of where the sun will be rising first on the morning of 1 January 2000," explains Catchpole. "But the fact that all the attention is centred around Kiribati and New Zealand, while there is no mention of Nicobar, has more to do with commerce than science," he adds. Several countries, led by New Zealand, have been pre-

ssuring the Royal Observatory to make it official that they will enjoy the first sunrise of the new millennium. "But we are very clear that technically, going by the accepted scientific norms, there is no argument about the fact that the Nicobar Islands will experience the first sunrise of the new millennium," affirms Catchpole.

The second (ignorance/indolence), sadly, seems to be the preserve of the Indian administration. "It's strange that we have received absolutely no inquiries from the Indian authorities yet," remarks Catchpole. True to form, the Indian bureaucratic machinery is just about waking up to the fact that there's a little bit of history awaiting the Nicobar Islands.

"We are aware of this fact. But we have no official documentation or intimation of this from the Royal Observatory. We are very happy to learn that you have got official assurance from Dr Catchpole on this matter," B.S. Banerjee, director, tourism, Andaman and Nicobar Administration told SUNDAY. "Two weeks back, we have sent a proposal to Delhi. If the government gives us the go-ahead, we will surely organise it in grand fashion. But if the ministry of tourism, culture or defence says no, then that's the end of the story."

In the capital's corridors of power, the first stirrings of activity can be detected. "We are working out a way in which to celebrate the occasion. But there are a lot of limitations," says C. Mishra, joint secretary, tourism. "It is a very remote and very difficult area. There is no way that a large number of people can be taken there. But we do hope to organise something special for a very selective group. And we have started highlighting the importance of the Nicobar Islands in the millennium experience at every national and international tourism meet," she adds.

So, is there hope yet of selling the Indian version of the great millennium dream to the world? A lot remains to be done, and fast. For surely, the first sunrise of the new millennium will wait for no one. Not even for the Indian administration to get its act together. •

Sumit Das Gupta/London

UTTAR PRADESH

The lady in question

Dissidents attack Kalyan Singh on Kusum Rai's meteoric rise

With chief minister Kalyan Singh and his detractors refusing to see eye to eye, the infighting in the BJP is boiling over in UP. It is an open secret that Kalyan Singh is not on talking terms with the state BJP chief Raj Nath Singh and his two Cabinet ministers, Lalji Tandon and Kalraj Misra. But things have come to such a pass that now they are compelled to come out in the open against the CM. Even L.K. Advani had to cancel his visit to Lucknow, where the BJP state executive was to meet on 16 May.

The tug-of-war between Kalyan Singh and about 50 dissident legislators has been going on for quite some time. Their main grouse was Kalyan's arbitrary style of functioning in which there was allegedly "no scope for merit or seniority while sycophancy and nepotism reigned supreme".



FAST TRACK: Kusum Rai with Kalyan Singh

At the centre of the face-off is the meteoric rise of Kusum Rai, a small-time party worker, at the expense of senior leaders. Despite the raging controversy over Rai's proximity to the chief minister, she was elevated overnight from the position of a municipal corporator to that of chairperson, State Social Welfare Board, with the status of a minister of state.

Kalyan supporters point out that while Rai became the flash point, the CM has been an eyesore for a particular lobby within the BJP right from day one. "When they could not accuse Kalyan of financial irregularities, they cooked up this

Question hour

The CBI interrogates Rabri Devi

Rabri Devi is in the limelight again. She is the first chief minister whose official residence was raided by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). And now, she also happens to be the first CM to be formally examined by the investigating agency.

On 20 May, Rabri Devi was questioned by the CBI in connection with the Rs 42.52 lakh disproportionate asset case (No.DA 5/98) lodged by the agency on 19 August last year against her husband Laloo Prasad Yadav. In this case, Rabri Devi is a witness.

Action commenced at 10.25 am when the CBI team led by DIG N.C. Verma and SP S.C. Mishra arrived at 1, Anne Marg, the CM's official residence. Accompanying the CBI team were two lady officers from the IT, brought in as witnesses.

But they were told that 'Madam' could spare only half an hour as she was slated to leave for her native village in Gopalganj district to attend a *shradh* ceremony of her relative. The CBI team, on its part, insisted that as it had to submit the progress report before the monitoring Bench of the Patna High Court, the cross examination had to be completed.

The IT officials, however, had to return before the inter-



bogey of moral turpitude, hoping to get him out of the coveted position," a senior minister remarked.

He was obviously hinting at the upper-caste Brahmin lobby led by Kalraj Misra who always nurtured designs of occupying the UP chief minister's chair. Misra, who had been close to the BSP leader Mayawati, was angling for the job when, under the rotational arrangement between BJP and BSP, Mayawati's six-month term came to an end.

But just as Mayawati was holding a brief for Kalraj, Kalyan Singh staged a coup on both the BSP and the Congress to forge a fresh alliance and grab the top job. Raj Nath Singh, who

was instrumental in roping in a large number of Thakur MLAs from the Congress, stood by Kalyan, much to the chagrin of the Brahmin lobby.

What further precipitated the crisis was a poster war unleashed by Kalyan's OBC supporters which converted the whole affair into a backward-versus-forward-caste feud. Some of the posters even went to the extent of demanding the resignation of Raj Nath Singh, Kalraj Misra and Lalji Tandon.

To control the damage, BJP bigwigs have despatched general secretary Govindacharya to Lucknow. After meeting the CM, Govindacharya held separate parleys with Kalraj Misra, Lalji Tandon and Raj Nath Singh, who frankly apprised him about the root cause of all the trouble — Kusum Rai. Govindacharya was informed of Rai's clout in Kalyan Singh's administration, which was being resented by senior BJP leaders.

Talking to newsmen, Govindacharya said: "The prevailing dissatisfaction was largely on account of a communication gap; the only solution lies in dialogue. I will talk to all. I have come here to know, understand and learn the problems, not to issue any fatwa."

But Govindacharya refused to divulge anything to the media after his meeting with the dissidents. The dissidents, too, for a change, preferred to keep mum, leaving everyone guessing. Apparently, just as the rebels have no intention to relent, Kalyan too is expected to stick to his guns. But later in the week, Kusum Rai decided to quit her job, which was the least which dissidents were expecting as a compromise formula.

While the fireworks continue, senior BJP leaders concede that the intra-party feud will eventually tell heavily on the party's prospects at the hustings. •

Sharat Pradhan/Lucknow

SANJAY KUMAR



TALKING TERMS: Rabri Devi

rogation could begin. After the identity of the two officials was disclosed, Rabri Devi put her foot down and maintained that she would not allow the quizzing to commence.

Frantic phone calls were made to joint director (East) U.N. Biswas who landed in Patna a day before and also to CBI headquarters in Delhi. Interrogation started after receiving clearance that the two IT officials can be sent back.

According to Rabri Devi, CBI officials read out about 70 to 80 questions. She was asked about her family background, qualification and her lifestyle. She was even asked as to which beauty parlour she visited. To which she reportedly said that neither she applies make-up nor goes for hair cut.

However, after an hour-and-a-half of interrogation, the CBI team was not apparently satisfied with Rabri Devi's answers and has voiced its dissatisfaction. Stepping out of the CM's residence, N.C. Verma said that the examination process was not yet over. Interestingly, while the interrogation was on, Laloo Yadav was nowhere to be seen. When asked by SUNDAY as to where he was, Laloo replied: "I was in the cowshed."

The latest round of interrogation of the Bihar CM is a fallout of the case lodged against Laloo who was earlier interrogated on 1 October, 1998. The case was lodged after the CBI assessed that Laloo Yadav had about Rs 42.50 lakh worth of disproportionate assets against his known sources of income. •

Naved Zaidi/Patna

Action stations

Cricket and politics take hold of the tube

We're back to cricket and politics. Or alternatively, to politics and cricket. Both jostling for Number One position, depending upon the time of the day. Post 2 pm, it's the turn of the bat and ball and eleven good men in Merrie England. Before and after, we are witness to the variegated form of boundaries and wides amongst the scores of men who rule the country, and amongst those who have set their sights on it.

The irrepressible Apple Singh, Bihari mascot of ESPN and Star Sports, is having himself a ball, dishing out expert advice to the English soccer hounds on the fine points of spin. The guy has such a heavy accent that he can justify being hailed from the land of Laloo. But he is also very funny, which is right now the only redeeming feature of the World Cup, from India's point of view at the time of writing. Azhar and his boys have convincingly snatched defeat from the jaws of victory, not once but twice.



PUSHED TO THE WALL: *the Indian cricket team*

The other provincial accent with which the commentary box is awash is Geoff Boycott's and his acrid comments also raise laughs, especially when the target is a rival player.

Meanwhile, the political circus is on full swing, in anticipation of the elections. Congress loyalists are swarming over the news channels, defending potential Prime Ministers who could be of foreign origin. Sonia Gandhi can, as usual, be seen and not heard on the issue. And caretaker PM Atal Behari Vajpayee, after being ginger about the foreign hand, has taken it further by declaring that leave alone the land's highest office, non-*desi* people cannot hold any high office.

All grist to the news channel mill which is likewise gearing for the polls. Till then, it's back to Appleji in Ol' Blighty, who is praying, as we are, for Sachin's quick return and a resurrection. •

WEST BENGAL

Bengal package

Mamata gets a boost as the PM lays the foundation of Metro extension

It was his second visit to the city in two months. In March, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee had come to Calcutta to attend a rally organised by the state unit of the BJP to mark one-year of the government at the Centre. This time round, his visit seemed to be aimed at fulfilling promises made to the Trinamul Congress and its leader Mamata Banerjee in her Bengal Package.

During his 24 hour stay in the state, Vajpayee visited Churulia in Burdwan district — birthplace of Kazi Nazrul Islam — to pay homage to the great Bengali poet on his birth centenary year. He also laid the foundation stone for extension of Metro Railways from Tollygunj to Garia.

On 20 May, the PM arrived at the Panagarh air base at around 1.30 pm. From Panagarh, he flew to Churulia in an army helicopter. After spending an hour there, the PM's chopper landed at the RCTC helipad in Calcutta at 4 pm.

In the evening, Vajpayee went to Tollygunj to lay the foundation stone. This was followed by a function at Rabindra Sadan to release cassettes and CDs. He returned to Raj Bhavan at around 7.30 pm. The PM left for Imphal the next morning.

The Metro extension will cover a distance of 8.45 km and will have seven new stations between Tollygunj and Garia in Calcutta's south suburb. According to G.R. Madan, general manager, Metro Railways, the Rs 696 crore project should be complete within five years. Nearly 33 per cent of the cost will be borne by the state and the rest will come from the Centre.

Trinamul leader Mamata Banerjee was present at Tollygunj to welcome the PM. While transport minister Subhash Chakraborty and PWD minister Kshiti Goswami represented the state government at Tollygunge, state's technical education and training minister Bansagopal Chowdhury received Vajpayee at Churulia.

Left Front leaders felt that as a "caretaker" PM, Vajpayee should not have indulged in foundation stone-laying ceremonies. However, within the Left Front itself, there was disagreement. RSP leader and PWD minister Kshiti Goswami felt that Vajpayee had not violated any code of conduct as the dates of elections were yet to be announced.

The state BJP leadership, however, took strong exception to the Left Front's attitude. It felt that Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee lacked courtesy. BJP state general secretary Rahul Sinha said: "Jyoti Basu belongs to the CPI(M). But we don't forget that he is also the chief minister of the state and therefore should be given that respect. Since Vajpayeeji is still the Prime Minister, it was very wrong and unethical for the CPI(M) to treat him with such disdain. People should realise who really is uncivilised." This was, no doubt, in reference to Jyoti Basu describing the BJP as "barbaric and uncivilised".

On the whole, it was a low-key affair. Sources say that during his stay in Calcutta, Vajpayee met Banerjee to discuss seat-sharing and electoral strategy for the coming elections. •

Arindam Sarkar/Calcutta



SUNDAY WEEK

KUSUM BHANDARI

BEGINNING 30 MAY, 1999

ARIES

(21 March-20 April)

Don't bite off more than you can chew. Take things one step at a time. You will do yourself more harm than good by trying to impress your boss by taking on more responsibilities. There may be a few hurdles at work. The actions or words of your spouse's relatives may confirm your worst suspicions.

TAURUS

(21 April-20 May)

Conflicts are likely to arise in personal life. You may find yourself in an uncomfortable two-way pull between romantic partners and friends. The question of divided loyalties can be a hard nut to crack. Some diplomatic talking may be required. Maintain a hard-headed approach to profits.

GEMINI

(21 May-20 June)

Memories about the past may flood into your mind. You may experience an irresistible urge to visit childhood places or old friends. Such visits can have more than nostalgic value. Events are unlikely to go according to plan. By being more flexible, you can turn the unexpected to your own advantage.

CANCER

(21 June-20 July)

You are prone to get overboard emotionally, but this will be a waste of time. You may not realize this yourself and it may need a pep talk from someone else. Attempts to make close acquaintances and loved ones meet may result in bickerings all around.

LEO

(21 July-20 August)

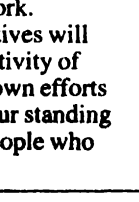
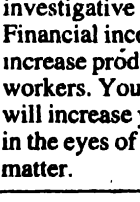
Remember to make preparations if there are changes in the wind. Something happening behind the scenes could mean that a home or accommodation of some sort comes along. You may think you have made a mistake and are ready to be disappointed. You are probably wrong. What you feared may never happen.



VIRGO

(21 August-20 September)

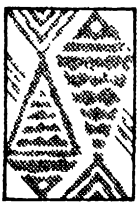
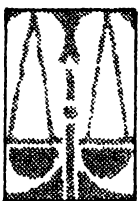
Your mental agility and real interest in finding things out makes you perfectly suited to investigative work. Financial incentives will increase productivity of workers. Your own efforts will increase your standing in the eyes of people who matter.



LIBRA

(21 September-20 October)

Things will be fine, if your finances are right. This may seem trite, but it's true. No financial worries means you remain in a good mood. The ambience at work will be very congenial. Take care of someone who matters, they may be feeling down and out. There may be misunderstandings in romance.



SCORPIO

(21 October-20 November)

You should try to get things straightened out as discreetly as possible before they hit the headlines. A settlement may be challenged. This could bring the past back into the public gaze. Officials may be demanding. Poor publicity can give you a bad name.



SAGITTARIUS

(21 November-20 December)

It would be a mistake to keep problems arising from marital and partnership affairs bottled up any longer. But this is not to encourage violent or hysterical outbursts. If partners are approached in a calm but serious manner, there is a good chance of relationship difficulties being solved.

CAPRICORN

(21 December-20 January)

Past mistakes or indiscretions that you thought had been left behind can now return to haunt you. People may come seeking revenge or settlements. And you may have to stand totally alone in the middle of their troubles. Family or household members will be neither sympathetic or cooperative.

AQUARIUS

(21 January-20 February)

You can save yourself time and effort by handling matters by correspondence rather than making visits in person. Even though there is probably less to do, you should endeavour to conserve your energy. Siblings will be cooperative. Simply pull out if business negotiations reach a stalemate.

PISCES

(21 February-20 March)

Happy times can be spent in the company of friends and family members. Romantic relationships that have reached an impasse may not be as dead as you think. Chances of making new beginnings are good now. Financial negotiations can be ended on a high note.



The foreign hand

■ The day Sonia Gandhi resigned as Congress president, the Sensex fell by 64 points. Some television reports were full of how the foreigner issue and her subsequent resignation had brought the Sensex crashing.

According to market analysts, however, they were way off the mark. Well, not so far off. For, the Sensex fell because of another foreigner, Alan Greenspan, about whose nationality there is no doubt. He is the chairman of the US Federal Reserve Board.

These days Indian markets are driven by foreign institutional investors, who



Sonia Gandhi: out of market

in turn are driven largely by what happens in the United States. And right now, things are not very rosy there. Inflation in the US has been the highest in nine years and at a meeting scheduled for the following day, the Fed is expected to cut interest rates by 50 basis points.

This would mean money flowing away from equity markets to bond markets. And on 17 May, the Sensex actually fell by a whopping 224.61 points, climbing only in the last half hour because of a dramatic State Bank of India-led recovery. India was not alone in so reacting. The anticipated Fed move

HEARD AT THE CII

Q: Why will Arjun Singh never get to be finance minister?

A: Because he added 93 to 140 and assured Sonia that the total was 272

A PRO-BJP INDUSTRIALIST IN RECALLING HOW SONIA GANDHI'S ADVISERS COULD ONLY MUSTER 233 LETTERS OF SUPPORT LAST APRIL

had created selling pressure all over the globe.

FII's now dominate the market so much that local political events seem to have little influence. Sonia's resignation leaves two options: a BJP-led government which the market thinks is not a bad thing and a third front coalition to which the response is cautious.

After all, it was during the Congress regime that the markets had the toughest time (remember Harshad Mehta). And they did passably well under both P. Chidambaram and Yashwant Sinha. Manmohan Singh is a good choice, but obviously not the only one.

This will remain so as long as some party doesn't come and reverse foreign



Alan Greenspan: shaking the Sensex

investment trends. And if a communist-supported coalition and a *swadeshi* government didn't do that, it is unlikely that anyone else will.

So, while politicians still argue about *swadeshi* and

videshi, the Indian markets are already globalised. And when Singh said that the process was irreversible, he was right.

They also sell

■ Finally, some proof that consumer promotions work. There's always been some doubt whether the huge ads of companies bring in as much as they cost. But a recent ORG-MARG survey reveals that at least promotion-related ads have an impact on FMCG (fast moving consumer goods) sales.

Not surprisingly, Hindustan Lever spends and gets the most from its promos. Between November 1998 and January 1999, it made sales of Rs 31.97 crore from this market followed not very closely by Colgate Palmolive (Rs 11.15 crore) and Nestle India (Rs 10.74 crore).

However, Lever does not depend substantially on promotions. The highest *proportion* of promotion-led sales still happens in smaller companies like Vicco Labs (33.4 per cent) and Balsara Hygiene.

None of this is surprising. Nor is it surprising that close to ten per cent of skin cream sales come through promos (Rs 22 crore). And during the survey period, the ongoing promos for Complan Chocolate contributed 17.39 per cent of the total off-take, while close to 45 per cent of Vicco Turmeric were bought because of their promos.

So, is this the legitimacy promos had been seeking? Well, here comes the clincher: other big FMCG companies like Procter and Gamble, Cadbury's and Britannia get less than one per cent of their revenue from promotion-related sales. And they are doing very well, thank you. •

CHECK-LIST

Private operators: their complaints about the telecom policy

■ **Competing with DoT:** All private operators will be competing with DoT in basic telephony. Yet, it was DoT itself that laid down the rules and evaluated bids. It is unheard of for a direct competitor to do that.

■ **Licensing fees:** Why are private telecom companies required to pay huge licence fees when private power companies are not? Then, the bids were given to the highest bidder — meaning that the company willing to charge the highest from the consumer won. Strangely, DoT pays no licence fee.

■ **STD and ISD:** DoT reserved this highest revenue-earning sector for itself. Further, the different operators could interconnect with each other only through DoT. And they will pay for calls from private phones to the DoT network and vice versa. This is *prima facie* a restrictive practice.

Clinical approach

For once Karnataka state ministers were looking forward to the Cabinet meeting called by their chief minister J.H. Patel last fortnight. The reason was not so much the agenda of the meeting but its locale. The chief minister was undergoing treatment at the



J.H. Patel: meeting ministers in hospital

high-profile Jindal Hospital; and so had scheduled a Cabinet meeting at the clinic itself. And everyone was looking forward to discussing affairs of the state over a cool glass of lemonade at the plush locale.

Apparently, Patel goes into hospital every couple of months to 'cleanse his system' of the alcohol. Only this time, he chose the fashionable Jindal Hospital. And so, it is to one of the plush cottages at Jindals, that his bureaucrats have to go to get their files cleared.

Surely, with elections round the corner, the chief minister has other, less plush, places to visit!

Secretarial truths

It's a strange see-saw for two of the Congress party's secretaries: Jairam Ramesh and Mani Shankar Aiyar. Initially it seemed as if Aiyar was out of favour with 10 Janpath, especially

HEARD AT THE BJP HEADQUARTERS

Don't waste a colour reel on me. Use a black and white roll.

BJP GENERAL SECRETARY K.N. GOVINDACHARYA ADVISING A PHOTOGRAPHER WHO WAS TRYING TO TAKE HIS PICTURE

after he had left the party. But given Aiyar's special talent, it did not take him long to win his way back into the good graces of those who count. He is also part of the panel that is chalking out the party's media strategy. In fact, it is Aiyar who has written the 16-page essay called

The Real Truth — the glossy booklet that the Congress is busy handing out to all and sundry.

Unfortunately, Ramesh has not been so lucky. His desperate treks to Vir Bhoomi notwithstanding, he is still to be admitted into the exalted inner circle. His best

bet remains Dr Manmohan Singh. But Dr Singh remembers all too clearly the time when Ramesh played somewhat the same role for his bete noire, Pranab Mukherjee. And Mukherjee is equally unforgiving about Ramesh's new loyalties.

Which means the best that Ramesh can hope for is to carry on functioning as Dr Manmohan Singh's PA. But his friends say that he is still better off than Aiyar: at least he is not a PA to a former PA (as party secretary, Aiyar has been deputed to work under general secretary R.K. Dhawan.).

Cool customer

The *chhupa rustom* in the Election Commission is the third election commissioner G.B. Lyngdoh. He sits quiet as a mouse throughout election commission meetings while M.S. Gill thunders and G.V.G. Krishnamurthy roars. And then he gets up and quietly reads out four or five lines from a piece of paper, committing everyone to agreeing to what went on at the meeting.

However, there's nearly always a sweet little sting in the tail. The last time there was an all party meeting everyone disagreed with everyone else and Dr Subramanian Swamy paraded himself as the self-styled guru of constitutional law.

But it was Lyngdoh who stole everyone's heart. He sat tranquilly through all screaming and shouting and then committed the gathering to unanimity about all the decisions. And then he read out from the note, deadpan, "...and if anything goes wrong, all of us here, agree to put all the blame on Dr Gill", and sat down, while those politicians who caught this, sputtered with laughter. •

CHECK-LIST

The Jain Commission: Arjun Singh's little cottage industry

■ **An excuse to form Congress(T):** In 1996 Arjun Singh split the Congress. He said he was leaving Narasimha Rao's Congress because it was doing little to speed up the Jain Commission of enquiry into Rajiv Gandhi's assassination. Unfortunately, not even Sonia bought that line for she failed to turn up at his rally in Talkatora Stadium.

■ **When he wanted a Lok Sabha seat:** In November 1997, Sitaram Kesri was contemplating joining I.K. Gujral's government, — and this, at a time when Arjun Singh was without a Lok Sabha seat. Singh fretted and fumed, and then he brought the House down: by using the Jain Commission (Interim) report as the excuse.

■ **Whenever he wants to prove his loyalty to Sonia:** According to Sonia's friends, she was upset by the fact that none of her so-called loyalists failed to defend her in the CWC when the matter of her foreign origins was raised. Singh heard this. And the very next day he trotted off to the home minister, letter in hand (which he immediately released to the press) asking L.K. Advani to provide a safety cover to key witnesses in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case.

■ **The reason why Sharad Pawar actually wrote the letter:** Singh has his own theory about Pawar's letter. He has been telling CWC members that the Maratha strongman was worried that Ranganath would expose his link with Chandra Swami in the Rajiv Gandhi murder. (Ranganath, who has recently been acquitted by the Supreme Court, has named Chandra Swami as the 'financier'. He is, however, yet to name Pawar.)

Desperate Swaraj

When will Sushma Swaraj get the message?

First she sat in a corner and sulked in silence during the party's national executive in Goa. Most guessed (correctly) that she was upset because she had not been given her Cabinet portfolios back and left her to meditate in silence.

When that did not get her the desired attention, she got desperate. At the next executive held in Delhi after the



Sushma Swaraj: failing to draw attention

Lok Sabha was dissolved, she announced grandly that she would not be fighting the next elections, but instead would devote herself to party work.

Unfortunately, most saw through this as well and assumed that she was reluctant to contest because she was scared that her enemies within the party (and she has quite a few) would work against her. To top it all, no one gave her any party work to do. And no one asked her to reconsider her decision.

Now she was really desperate. So, she despatched two truckloads of loyalists from Haryana to L.K. Advani's house. The delegation begged Advani to persuade their 'behan' to change her mind. The home minister heard them out, smiled and said: "Agar aap log mujhe kuch sanket de rahan hain, to main kuch samjha nahin. Agar kuch keh rahan hain, to maine kuch suna nahin. (If

HEARD AT 24 AKBAR ROAD

This election will be 'Goan with the wind'.

A CONGRESS WORKER WHEN HE WAS TOLD THE LIST OF CONGRESS CANDIDATES FOR THE GOAN ELECTIONS CONSISTED MAINLY OF HISTORY-SHEETERS

you are trying to give me some kind of a hint, then I have not understood anything)." Call him what you like, but no one can accuse the

CHECK-LIST

The Congress crisis: who all have gained

■ **Dr Manmohan Singh:** Whenever Sonia Gandhi declined to become the party's prime ministerial candidate, Congressmen would look for suitable alternatives. And invariably came up with two names — P.A. Sangma and Dr Manmohan Singh. Both had the same selling points: a clean image, no ambition (or so one was led to believe) and no mass base. With Sangma out of the way and the Congress without a prime ministerial candidate, Singh is back to giving coy, smirking smiles.

■ **Pranab Mukherjee:** Who would have ever thought they'd see Pranab Mukherjee chair a Congress Working Committee? But after Sonia handed in her resignation letter, she turned to Pranab and asked him to chair the meeting in her absence. Of course, party spokespersons are hard-put to explain why Pranab has chaired all the consequent CWC meetings as well. "He's the senior-most," said Ajit Jogi. And refused to explain what exactly the criteria for Pranab's seniority was.

■ **Matang Singh:** Now that his bete noire has been expelled from the party, Matang Singh has made a sudden comeback in Congress politics. Last week, he sent a truckload of supporters from the north-east to 10 Janpath to shout slogans against P.A. Sangma. And considering that he didn't get along too well with Tariq Anwar either, expect another truckload of Biharis outside 10 Janpath soon.

■ **Arjun Singh:** With Sharad Pawar out of the way, Singh's supporters (Sorry, read that lobbyists. He has no supporters.) are claiming that he's the party's undisputed No 2. And with Sonia Gandhi refusing to take back her resignation, Congressmen are waiting for him to make a bid for the No 1 slot as well.

■ **Suresh Kalmadi:** He hasn't come as yet, but Kalmadi has announced his intention of returning to the Congress now that Sharad Pawar has been expelled. Finally, Kalmadi's dream will come true as hard as he tried, no one in the BJP addressed him as the Maharashtra strongman. Not with Pramod Metkari around. But now the Congress has that slot empty — and Kalmadi is sure that he has what it takes to fill it.

home minister of being dumb. So, what does that make Sushma Swaraj?

Bhagwat Puran

■ Vishnu Bhagwat may have been sacked from the navy but his career is far from over. Apparently, he's now planning to change careers and move directly into politics. He has offered, suo moto, to campaign for the Congress(I) in the general elections.

The Congress is weighing the options of using him. Given Sonia Gandhi's antipathy to George Fernandes, something Bhagwat shares, he could be a useful stick to hit the BJP with. At the same time, some in the Congress counsel caution about using the services of a chief of naval staff who was sacked barely three months ago.

So expect a shadow defence minister of India: Vishnu Bhagwat!

Capital notice

■ The vice-president's plans to build around his house have been summarily dealt with by the committee to rebuild Delhi.

Krishna Kant wanted to carry out some alterations to his already palatial bungalow. He assumed that no one could have any objections to this — he was the vice-president after all.

However, the chairman of the committee set up to preserve Lutyens' Delhi, M.N. Buch, has refused permission to him, on the grounds that it will deface the capital city designed by Lutyens.

Equally short shrift has been given to the proposal of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee that some homes in Lutyens' Delhi be demolished to set up blocks of flats.

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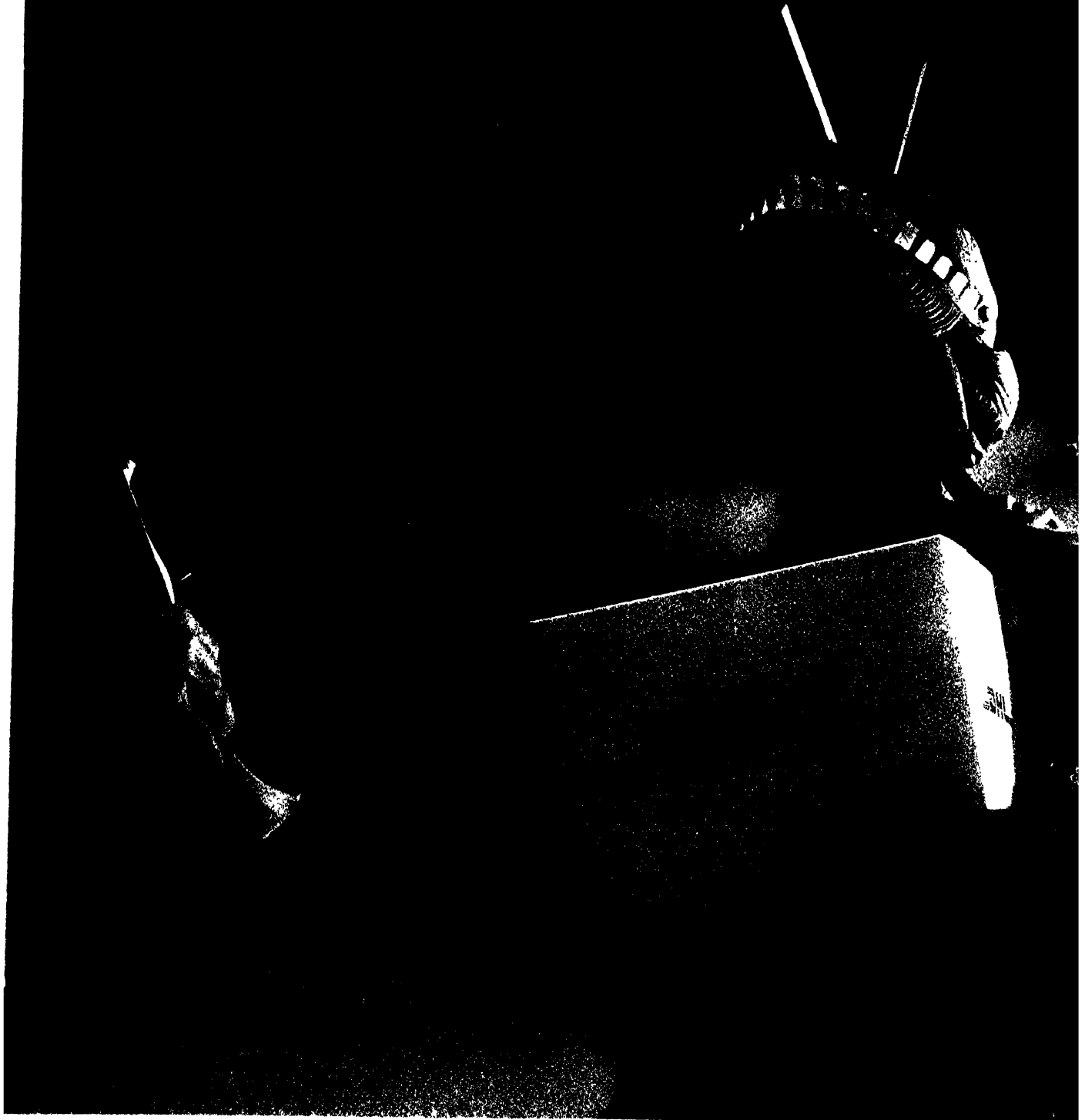
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THE CONGRESS REBELS NEW PARTY

SUNDAY

Can India and Pakistan ever co-exist?



Scenes from Kargil

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 An ageing aunt longing to hold your hand
 A childhood friend distanced by work

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Mudra VIP 6

Letters.....	4
Sight and Sound.....	6
News.....	59
Sunday Week.....	63
Business Diary.....	64
Random Notes.....	65
Delhi Diary.....	66



THE CULTURE PROFILE

Off the beaten track

Self-taught film-maker Ram Gopal Verma has rewritten the rules of mainstream cinema..... 40

THE BOOK TRADE

Writers' workshop

More Indians are writing in English than ever before. But does that mean a boom in the publishing industry?..... 34

COLUMNS

MANI-TALK

Mani Shankar Aiyar..... 8

POWER PLAY

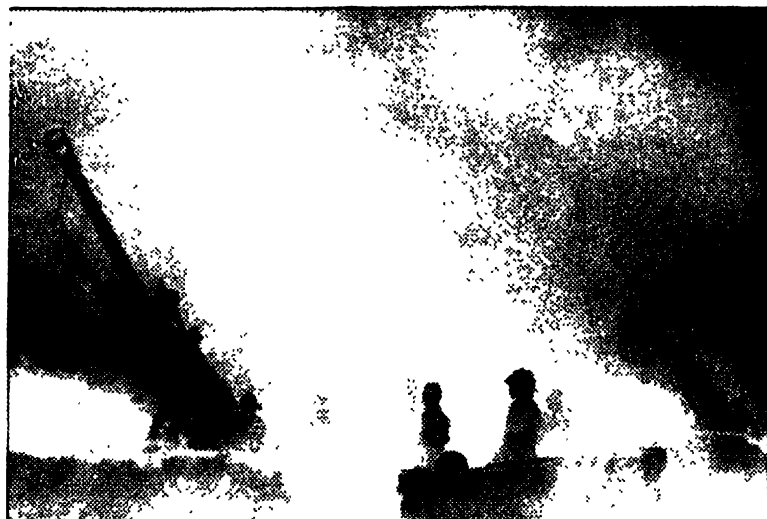
Rajiv Shukla..... 11

THE SOUTH BLOCK

Inder Malhotra..... 43

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COVER STORY 12

Back from the brink of peace

Can India and Pakistan ever be friends?

POLITICS 28

Heart of the matter

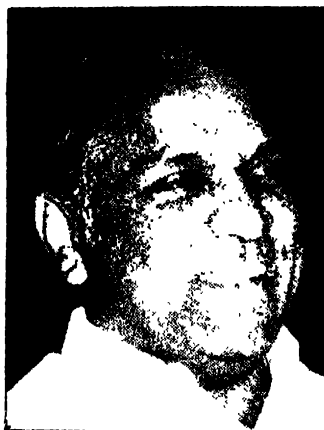
Was the BJP dissidence in UP a proxy war between Vajpayee and Advani?



SPECIAL REPORT 44

Pawar game

The Congress rebels float a new party





The outsider?

The cover story *The challenge* (23—29 May) has rightly pointed out that the issue of Sonia Gandhi's Italian origin has thrown up an unexpected crisis. Just as the Congress rebels of 1977 were fiercely denounced for criticising the imposition of Emergency, the Pawar-Sangma-Anwar troika was rightly demonised by the die-hard Congressmen for being the BJP's Trojan horse. The rebels have definitely some ulterior motive in bringing out the issue at a time when the general elections are only three months away.

Sonia Gandhi: Indian, by choice



Though the last fortnight's political drama had all the ingredients of a Bollywood tear-jerker, it has proved a point without doubt: Sonia's unquestioned popularity among the partymen. In fact, with Sonia's resignation, the Congressmen rediscovered their skills in emotional overkill.

For a Congress steeped in the dynastic tradition, Sonia Gandhi proved herself to be the key to electoral success and by resigning from the post of party president, she has taken the moral high ground to establish her supremacy over the party.

Blmal Chaudhury, Calcutta (West Bengal)

■ Sonia Gandhi's resignation has exposed the fact that the party cannot visualise a political future outside the dynasty. With the issue of her foreign origin throwing the party into turmoil, the resignation drama could be Sonia Gandhi's way of quelling the unexpected rebellion by three senior party leaders.

With the troika—Pawar, Sangma and Anwar—ready to form a new Front, the Congress will have a tough time especially in Maharashtra in

the coming general elections. And in the event of a hung Parliament, the troika may well decide the balance of power.

Priya Kumar, Bombay (Maharashtra)

Awareness campaign

This refers to the story *United against AIDS* (2—8 May). I appreciate the efforts of Dr Shakuntala Dawesar spreading awareness about AIDS amongst college students. It is a social service of the highest order. It is in the fitness of things that not only Dr Dawesar but various NGOs have also realised the importance of tapping the college-going students for spreading awareness. We must wage an all-out war against this killer disease. We need imaginative public awareness ads and media campaigns to bring home the point.

Onkar Chopra, New Delhi

Lesser evil?

The columnist has pointed out the wrongs during the 13-month-rule of the BJP-led government (*What wrong did this man do?* 9—15 May). But while the BJP has been serious to give good governance, it appears that the Congress is on the way to follow the footsteps of the BJP in forming regional alliances. Will the Congress ensure that they do not commit the same mistakes which the BJP did?

A. Jacob Sahayam, Thiruvananthapuram (Kerala)

Killer instinct

This refers to the story *The cup that cheers* (16—22 May). True, there was disappointment about India's loss to South Africa, but there



Sourav Ganguly: stellar show at Taunton

was no feeling of shame. The Indian team at least put up a gritty performance before losing out. But the loss against Zimbabwe was a kind of humiliation that would rankle the cricket-crazy Indians' hearts for a long time.

What India needs badly is the hunger to win. Though it is difficult to repeat the 1983 performance, the two successive wins against Kenya and Sri Lanka would give the Indian team the much-needed boost.

Bhupen Basu, Calcutta (West Bengal)

Missing you

This refers to the column headlined *We'll miss you, Mr Yogi* (16—22 May).

It was very much painful and shocking to hear the death of Mohan Gokhale who was better known as Mr Yogi. He has acted in many Marathi films and serials. He has given Marathi cinema a new life. Mr Yogi's entire family including Yogi's

father Chandrakant Gokhale and elder brother Vikram Gokhale is also a top class Marathi performer. The Marathi film lovers are really proud of Yogi and his family. May his soul rest in peace.

Millind D. More, Nashik (Maharashtra)

Ethnic cleansing

The racist attacks on minority communities in London is indescribably horrendous and it is an irony that the corrosive influence of racism vis-a-vis neo-Nazi groups like Combat 18 and the White Wolves continues unabated in a country which takes pride in being free, pluralistic and cosmopolitan (*Shattered!*, 16—22 May).

Maybe Prince Charles himself is inadvertently instrumental in evoking racist feelings among the frustrated youth of London because he has never concealed his admiration for the ethnic Asian minorities and has time and again reminded the people of England about their remarkable contribution to the country.

The Prince of Wales even went as far as to request the people of England to emulate the highly industrious ethnic minorities — more particularly the Sikhs of Southall — and this could have perhaps been a blow to their inflated egos.

It's a pity that with an indifferent government and a complacent racist police force doing precious little to contain these atrocities, the neo-Nazi targets like the Blacks, Asians and gays have to rally around and form monitoring groups like the anti-Nazi league to insulate themselves from future attacks. Apparently, the neo-Nazi organisations seem to be enjoying the patronage of



the police force and with the British government not seeming to be overly enthusiastic about banning these racist groups, the security of the ethnic minorities definitely stands threatened in a country that is supposed to champion issues like human rights.

Nalini Sudhakaran, Trivandrum (Kerala)

Double standards

Doublespeak is the most distinctive feature of the BJP (*After the fall* 25 April—1 May). After its defeat on the floor of the Lok Sabha on 17 April 17, Prime

The BJP leadership: failed to deliver the goods

Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said he respected the verdict of Lok Sabha. But, soon he termed it a deception by the Opposition conveniently forgetting that this defeat had come because of the withdrawal of the support of AIADMK, an ally of the BJP.

Before the 1998 elections, the BJP had promised to give a stable government but this proved to be the weakest. A promise had been made by the BJP that it would follow a policy of consensus but this policy was not followed. Vajpayee had come out with this resolve

that he would not contest any election in future but now he has backed out from this commitment.

The claim that the national economy under this government has made progress is far from reality.

Dr M. Hashim Kidwai, New Delhi

Highly unrealistic

The columnist has suggested a mechanism to avoid the President being dragged into political controversies during a constitutional crisis (*In the dock*, 2—8 May). But the proposal seems highly unrealistic. Would the "panel" be a permanent one or be set up for the occasion?

S. Venkatesan, Delhi

SEPARATED AT BIRTH?

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Kanu Senyal
Naxalite leader



Bipin Goswami
Painter

Contributed by Nilima Banerjee, Calcutta (West Bengal)

In our issue dated 16—22 May in Delhi Diary, we had reported that the minister of sport, Ms Uma Bharti, had asked the BCCI to support and sponsor a trip of some of her friends to England to watch the World Cup.

We are now informed that Ms Bharti had only sought free passes for friends to watch the World Cup and not a free trip. We regret the error. —Editor

MILESTONES

AWARDED: to Murali Nayar, the Golden Camera at the Cannes Film Festival for his film *Marana Simhasanam* (*Throne Of Death*). The award is for first-time directors in any of the festival's sections or sidebar events.

APPOINTED: K.P. Bhattarai, former Nepali Congress president, as Prime Minister of Nepal.

DIED: Guru Hanuman, 98, grand old man of Indian wrestling, in a car accident at Meerat on 24 May. The Dronacharya

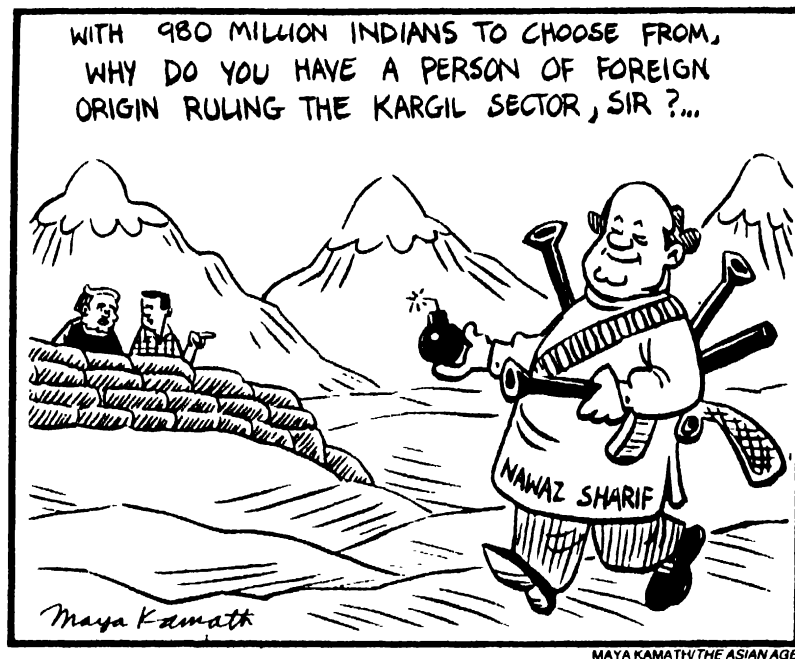


awardee and five others were driving to Hardwar for a holy dip in the Ganges when the car crashed into a tree following a tyre burst.

RECORDED: by Sourav Ganguly and Rahul Dravid, the highest partnership in one-day internationals at Taunton, England. The two put on 318 runs for the second wicket against Sri Lanka in a Group A league match. Ganguly's 183, the second-highest in the World Cup, was also the best by an Indian surpassing Kapil Dev's 175 against Zimbabwe in 1983.

LAUNCHED: by Sharad Pawar, P.A. Sangma and Tariq Anwar, expelled Congressmen, the Nationalist Congress Party on 27 May.

SIGHT & SOUND



MAYA KAMATH/THE ASIAN AGE

■ All possible steps will be taken. We believe that *shakti* and *shanti* go together.

A.B. V A J P A Y E E, Prime Minister, when asked if clearing-out operations in Kargil will include air strikes

■ We have been saying for a long time that the communists' public posturing against foreign funds is a sham.

M A M A T A B A N E R J E E, Trinamul Congress chief, after West Bengal's Left Front government accepted a British grant for building 30,000 primary schools



■ If Bombay could become Mumbai and Madras Chennai, then why can't Calcutta be changed to Kolkata?

S U N I L G A N G O P A D H Y A Y, Bengali novelist, who led a delegation of intellectuals to acting CM Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee to propose renaming West Bengal as Paschim Banga and its capital as Kolkata

■ A rising tide lifts all boats. Similarly, India cannot progress in a meaningful way if some of its states lag behind.

Y A S H W A N T S I N H A, Union finance minister, on the need for all-round regional development

■ If I get a hundred and the team loses, there is no joy. There is greater joy if I contribute nothing and the team wins.

R A H U L D R A V I D, Indian batsman, after his 145 against Sri Lanka

■ Acting and writing are very linked. They are both about creating characters and situations; the only difference is that one is put on celluloid and the other is put down on paper.

T A R A D E S H P A N D E, film actress, whose first book *50 and Done*, a collection of short stories interspersed with poetry, was published by HarperCollins

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The Moopanar

Hum Aapke Hain Kaun?



Whatever became of Moopanar? It is hard to believe that a mere three years ago, he held in his hands the keys to the Kingdom. Even harder to remember that just two years ago he almost made it to Prime Minister. Curious that a year ago he did not do the obvious and return to the Congress once it came to be headed by Sonia Gandhi. He first reduced him-

self to an appendage of Karunanidhi. Now he is an appendage in search of a hook. The obvious hook is the Congress of Sonia Gandhi and so he hints at an alliance with the party to which by rights he belongs. But the offer comes with strings attached. He will neither join, nor join hands with, a Congress in chorts with Jayalalitha. Thus, the whole of his politics is reduced to eliminating one woman from the politics of the country. Just one woman. What a derisory objective for a nation of 1,000 million people!

The grounds for this concentrated hatred of one in 100 crore are amusing. Jayalalitha, he alleges, is the Mother of all Corruption. To finish her, he joins the Father of all Corruption! The cases against Jayalalitha are still to be tried substantively in the courts of law. The evidence against Karunanidhi was collated by a sitting Supreme Court judge, a justice of the highest eminence, one whose name went on to add lustre to the most comprehensive package of constitutional reforms ever proposed and, later, the Press Council — Justice R.S. Sarkaria. Moopanar has never been able to explain how joining hands with the much-indicted Karunanidhi, in order to indict Jayalalitha, constitutes either principled or even consistent politics. Especially as Justice Sarkaria's indictment of Karunanidhi is compounded by the indictment of Karunanidhi by two other eminent persons — one more judge and one of India's best-known jurists.

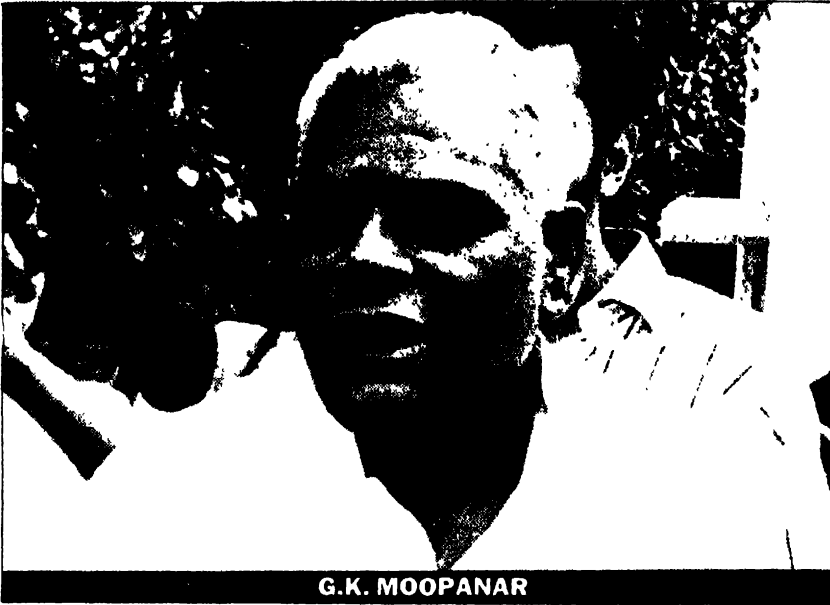
THE JUDGE IS Justice M.C. Jain of the Jain Commission, who has deplored the failure of the CBI's Special Investigation Team (SIT) headed by Karthikeyan to investigate the DMK leader's role in the events leading to the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. That investigation is now on, by the Multi-Disciplinary Monitoring Agency (MDMA) of the CBI constituted by the Vajpayee government as part of its Action Taken Report (ATR) on Justice Jain's findings. The jurist is, of course, P. Chidambaram. Rarely has the Lok Sabha witnessed a more brilliant forensic performance than Chidambaram's searing indictment of Karunani-



SHARAD PAWAR

Pawar like Moopanar represents not the politics of conviction but the politics of convenience. He clambers his way to the top on the corpses of those who have helped him climb the immediately lower rung. There could be few politicians less trusted in our politics than Pawar

of Maharashtra



G.K. MOOPANAR

Moopanar lost his political bearings when hatred of one woman became the be-all and end-all of his politics. Pawar has lost his bearings for much the same reason. While, however, Moopanar had his five minutes of fame under Gowda and Gujral, Pawar is set to sink without a trace come September

dhi on 25 February, 1991. Justice Jain has validated and endorsed everything of substance with which Chidambaram charged Karunanidhi. (Readers who wish to refresh their memories of that outstanding performance are invited to re-read the four-part "Southern Perfidy" published in *Mani-Talk*, SUNDAY magazine, June-July 1996.)

On the surface, there has been a parting of ways between Moopanar and Karunanidhi. Recovering something of his shine as a Congressman of half-a-century's standing, Moopanar instructed the three MPs of his Tamil Maanila Congress (TMC) to vote against the motion of confidence moved by the BJP. He has subsequently declined to share with the DMK the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance platform. Whether he will maintain this position of principle is not easy to predict, for two of his

closest colleagues are not averse to sleeping with the enemy. Chidambaram told STAR TV, as early as the immediate aftermath of the May 1996 elections, that he was personally not averse to discussing government formation with the BJP. And Karunanidhi has revealed that even as the TMC were drawing the wool over Sonia Gandhi's eyes by voting against the motion of confidence, Peter Alphonse, TMC spokesman and Rajya Sabha MP, was egging on the DMK to vote with the BJP.

MOOPANAR IN MID-1999 is thus a leader without a party. Of the three MPs he brought to the Lok Sabha in 1998 (down from 18 the previous election), one N. Dennis, has already joined the Congress; one Chidambaram is clearly getting ideas above his station, and one, the MP for my former constituency of Mayiladuturai, is a celebrated cipher. I hate using favoured journalistic clichés — but rarely has there been a better example than Moopanar of a politician caught between a rock and a hard place.

Sharad Pawar is now positioning him-



JAYALALITHA



KARUNANIDHI

Jayalalitha, Moopanar alleges, is the Mother of all Corruption. To finish her, he joins the Father of all Corruption — Karunanidhi

self to be the Moopanar of the third millennium. His politics too is concentrated on hatred of one woman. Like Moopanar, he calls himself a Congressman even after abandoning the Congress. Like Moopanar, he will go anywhere and to any lengths — including political suicide — to fulfill his one-point programme of eliminating one woman from the politics of the country. To stop Sonia Gandhi becoming Prime Minister, Peter Alphonse incited the DMK to switch sides. To stop Sonia Gandhi becoming Prime Minister, Sharad Pawar incited

at the RSS headquarters in Nagpur.

PAWAR, LIKE MOOPANAR, represents not the politics of conviction but the politics of convenience. He clambors his way to the top on the corpses of those who have helped him climb the immediately lower rung. There could be few politicians less trusted in our politics than Pawar. The BJP-Shiv Sena are as aware of his dodgy credentials as those in the parties and factions to which he has previously belonged. They recognise — and appreciate — his nuisance value,

gress in some Maharashtra constituencies, but in opposition to both the Congress and the BJP-Shiv Sena he will have difficulty retaining his own seat in Baramati, let alone getting any additional seats for his other candidates. This is written into the arithmetic of the voting pattern in Maharashtra. True, the Congress under the state-level leadership of Sharad Pawar won more seats in Maharashtra in 1998 than in any other state. But in each of those constituencies, there was a Congress vote in addition to a Pawar vote. The two were merged



MULAYAM SINGH YADAV

Mulayam Singh Yadav to switch sides. I have no proof of this last assertion, but the same Sharad Pawar who said he would have no truck with Mulayam Singh after Mulayam sabotaged the prospects of an alternative government, now embraces the same Mulayam as his main ally. Adds up, doesn't it?

Ambiguity also marks his attitude to the BJP. At one level of rhetoric, he aims to realise a Congress destiny outside the Congress; at another, as his colleagues Tariq Anwar and P.A. Sangma are discovering with some alarm, his real objective is to realise a Congress destiny, courtesy not just the BJP but even the Shiv Sena. Like Chidambaram became the standard bearer of the Rajiv legacy in the company of the LTTE's best friend, so Sharadrao seeks to attain secularism

To stop Sonia Gandhi becoming PM, Pawar incited Mulayam Singh Yadav to switch sides. I have no proof of this assertion, but the same Pawar who said he would have no truck with Mulayam after Mulayam sabotaged the prospects of an alternative government, now embraces the same Mulayam as his main ally. Adds up, doesn't it?

but they are not going to let him ride their backs even to another spell as chief minister of Maharashtra let alone Prime Minister of the country. On the other hand, just as Moopanar without the DMK is a zero, so Pawar without the BJP-Shiv Sena is a zero. He will certainly damage the prospects for the Con-



SONIA GANDHI

when Pawar was in the Congress; disintegrated, it might mean reverses for the Congress in some constituencies, but will certainly not translate there into victories for Pawar. Unless, of course, the BJP-Shiv Sena transfers him their vote as the DMK did to Moopanar in 1996-98.

Moopanar lost his political bearings when hatred of one woman became the be-all and end-all of his politics. Pawar has lost his bearings for much the same reason. While, however, Moopanar had his five minutes of fame under Gowda and Gujral, Pawar is set to sink without a trace come September. Which is why the name of the new party, based on the names of its three leaders in alphabetic order — Anwar, Sangma, Sharad — should read Congress(ASS). •

Fatal failure

Those who failed to protect the border must be made accountable



It is most unfortunate that the process of infiltration in the Kargil sector began in the end of March and Indian forces came to know of it only on 6 May when a group of infiltra-

tors fired on a squad of the Indian Army. As there was only one battalion in the sector, reinforcements took another 18 days and by that time hundreds of them had sneaked in. According to an estimate, it takes six weeks to get acclimatised at such high altitudes. Which means they had gathered at the border much before crossing the Line of Control.

When Atal Behari Vajpayee was shaking hands with Nawaz Sharif in Lahore, the Pakistan Army was busy pushing its soldiers and militants into Indian territory. It is shameful that our government and military intelligence had no inkling of it for more than one-and-a-half months. It is the foremost duty of the Prime Minister and the defence minister to fix responsibility on those who failed to protect the border, particularly when it is well known that militants try to cross the border around this time.

There is also a view that during winter most of our *jawans* come down leaving the peaks unguarded assuming that nobody would try to cross the border in such inclement weather. Pakistani forces took advantage of this as they knew that the Indian forces will come back to LoC only in May. Their army men in the guise of Kashmiri militants sneaked in and captured Indian bunkers also.

It is now crystal clear that there are two forces ruling Pakistan. One is the political leadership which is only a mask and the other is the military which is the real ruler. When Vajpayee was in Lahore, there were reports in Pak newspapers that military officers did not like the visit and were against Sharif organising a warm welcome for the Indian PM. In fact, it was the pressure of the military that forced Sharif to say during the visit that there would be no compromise on

Kashmir.

This time the situation is altogether different. Pakistan has sent its army men under the garb of militants to fight a decisive battle in Kashmir on the pattern of Afghanistan. Now India cannot sit idle. It will have to teach a lesson to Pakistan for betraying the faith after Lahore Declaration.

Pakistani soldiers) is essential as they are still in the hideouts and bunkers. Though the official figure given is 600, according to another estimate, more than 1,000 people with sophisticated weapons may have already entered the Indian borders and a couple of thousand more are waiting at the LoC.

The defence ministry has also come



Scene at Kargil: India cannot sit idle

When Vajpayee was shaking hands with Sharif in Lahore, the Pak Army was busy infiltrating Indian territory. It is shameful that our government and military intelligence had no inkling of it

Meanwhile, the possibility of a ground battle in the three sectors on the Pakistan border — Kupwara, Kargil and Neelam Valley — cannot be ruled out. While India is in an advantageous position in the Neelam Valley, Kupwara will be quite difficult for Indian soldiers as Pakistani forces are based at higher altitudes.

According to sources in the defence ministry, air strikes alone cannot flush out all the infiltrators as they have spread over a vast area. A ground battle with these infiltrators (most of them

to know that F-16 aircraft in Pakistan have been put on the alert, in case relations between the two countries deteriorate further on the issue of Kargil. This alert has escalated tension between the two governments as the use of F-16s by Pakistan against India will trigger a full-scale war.

It is for the first time that Pakistani soldiers under the garb of militants have entered Indian territory to wage a war in the Kashmir Valley. Pakistan had plans to infiltrate 15,000 soldiers into Kashmir as they had done in Afghanistan. •

There is now enough evidence to nail Pakistan's direct involvement in the invasion of Kargil

Batt

There are two bridges over the Shingo river in Kargil. One leads to the Line of Control (LoC) through the Kargil defences on to Skardu-Gilgit in Pakistan. The other is the gateway to Leh. Up until 1974, there was a formidable checkpost and a notice on the bridge. It read: "Foreigners not permitted beyond this point." There was perhaps a need for similar warnings in the gaps between the defences on the LoC in the sprawling Kargil sector. No one ever got past the Gurkha sentries on the bridge except an Italian diplomat with his Latin American girlfriend. Even they were nabbed in Batalik.

Now an assortment of Afghan guest militants, surplus to the Taliban inventory, tribal volunteers from Pakistan's Northern Areas and Pakistani regular soldiers have ingressed and occupied commanding heights 5 to 8 km in depth over a 100 km front all in 121 Infantry Brigade sector. This vexed sector has the exacting operational responsibility from Zojila Pass in the west to Chorbatala in the east covering nearly 200 km of frontage in the most difficult terrain after Siachen.

For years, generals have pored over the map to settle its operational jurisdiction and juggled with troops and extent of operational responsibility, switching it from operational command under Leh to independent status at Kargil and back to placing Kargil and Siachen under a separate division. At one time, Srinagar took charge of Kargil.

Understanding terrain

A map study is essential to understand the battle for Kargil. The road from Srinagar crosses the 11,000 ft Zojila Pass into Dras, Kargil and Leh. This is the lifeline for Ladakh which is open only five months in a year. There is an alternative route via Manali to Leh.

The LoC runs almost parallel and at distances varying from 10 to 20 km as the crow flies from it upto Kargil where it is the closest. Hereafter, the road and the LoC fork away from each other. Zojila Pass, Dras and Kargil are vulnerable to interdiction by Pakistani artillery. The two armies have frequently jockeyed for positions that dominate this road. Military posts have changed hands several times before 1965, during the 1965 war and during the 1971 war.

Point 13620, overlooking Kargil, was captured twice by Indian troops but returned to Pakistan. In 1971, it was retaken and not returned. The mountainous terrain is tortuous, barren and very sparsely populated. Troops are deployed between 14,000 and 17,000 feet with wide gaps which are glaciated or snow-covered and, therefore, inaccessible. These areas used to be kept under surveillance by helicopter reconnaissance and foot patrolling. The population of this area is a mix of Shia and Sunni and beyond Kargil, Buddhist.

Mountain fighting

Operations in high altitude mountain terrain have to be deliberate, detailed and logistically foolproof. They are undertaken during hours of darkness or in adverse weather conditions. A couple of soldiers occupying a pinnacle can hold back a large force. Military and mountaineering skills are required to capture these defences.

**An Indian Army convoy on the Kargil-Srinagar
highway**



le for Kargil



SUNDAY 6—12 June 1999



A.B. Vajpayee and George Fernandes discuss the Kargil impasse

Fire and manoeuvre, rather than direct assault, is the tactic used for flushing out the intruders. Minimising casualties is as major a factor as capturing the intruders. Given these operational constraints, eviction plans will take time as forces arrive, acclimatise and deploy for operations. Till then, the intrusions have to be effectively contained. The use of the Air Force is very effective for this.

The intrusions

Pakistan chose to wage its third war in J&K against 121 Infantry Brigade. The intrusions from Mashkoh in the west, to Batalik in the east in four pockets are all in here because there are wide gaps between defences. It is being said that intruders came in December-January, that is before the bus ride to Lahore. This

seems highly unlikely due to the difficulty of sustenance and the danger of early detection. The intruders would have worked out the earliest and latest dates for entry based on their objectives and the opening of Zojila Pass around the first week of June. So the earliest they might have come is mid-April.

Civilians in Batalik reported movement of unfamiliar figures on 4 May. Patrol clashes occurred in Batalik and Dras between 8 and 12 May when troops were alerted. Combined ground and air action was launched only on 26 May. Some valuable time was lost in preparing and presenting plans because the army chief was out of the country.

During the 1965 infiltration, Pakistan had intruded into the Poonch sector. Military commanders decided to postpone its immediate eviction to one month later during which time a small intrusion had blown up into a big defended post. This came to be known as the Battle of OP Hill and cost the Indian Army dearly in clearing.

The battle so far

Combined air and ground operations have progressed satisfactorily. The limit of intrusions has been slowly rolled back towards the LoC. In the process, some new intrusions were discovered.

The real picture

Myths about the war

1. Posts held by the intruders are the ones vacated by the Indian Army

Wrong. In this sector there are no winter-vacated posts

2. There is civilian population in proximity to the area of intrusions

Wrong. There is no civilian population except in Batalik

3. Intrusions overlook the road

Wrong. Except in Dras and Kaksar, intrusions do not overlook the road

4. Pakistan has done a Siachen on India

Wrong. Siachen is in no-man's land. These intrusions are

across the LoC and behind Indian defences on the LoC

5. India should do a tit-for-tat

Wrong. This would be most unwise as the war has to be kept localised and not escalated

6. Use of air power was ill-advised

Only partially correct. It is true that the Air Force is not effective in the mountains especially under the additional constraints of uni-directional movement and proximity to the LoC. But it is a great morale booster and a signal of the country's resolve to roll back the intrusions

7. We should be prepared for Pakistan fighting a long-drawn war

Wrong. Pakistan's already battered economy cannot cope with this

8. The war will end next week

Wrong. Fighting is likely to go on for at least six to eight weeks unless the intruders decide to withdraw



Pall-bearers carry the coffin of Sqd. Ldr. Ajay Ahuja

AFP

The forward line of defences and the screen positions have been pushed back. A few of the main defended posts have also been retaken. The process is extremely slow. Classic small-unit infantry actions have been fought, including hand-to-hand combat.

Some analysts are saying that resistance is cracking and it's only a matter of time before the white flag goes up. This is very unlikely unless a political order is given to fall back. These intruders are tough fighters with years of experience in guerrilla warfare. There is also some clarity now about the composition of the intruding force. Estimated to be around 800 to 1,000, the hardcore consists of the Afghan Mujahideen, experts in mountain warfare. There are volunteers from PoK and Pak regulars who are providing the leadership. This is the approximate combination of forces which took Kabul in 1996 and Mazar-i-Sharif in 1997 and 1998.

Pakistani objectives

Pakistan has raised the threshold of a proxy war by inducting a force of Pakistan regulars and Taliban to capture and hold ground across the LoC.

Why would the Pakistan Army carry out a sustained and flagrant violation of the LoC, fully aware it would attract immediate retribution and destroy the Lahore peace process? One reasoning is that hardliners in the army, impatient over the drag in Kashmir, have launched these limited attacks, some say over the head of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to test India's resolve in defending it under a caretaker regime which is still basking in the euphoria of bus diplomacy.

But it is unlikely Nawaz Sharif did not know about the operation. What is possible is that he may have allowed the army an inch but they grabbed several yards. So the question is: was the intrusion planned, limited to securing shal-

low bridgeheads or was there a grand plan?

The Lashkar-e-Toiba has claimed responsibility for these intrusions with the following objectives: cut off the Zojila-Leh road, capture Kargil and rekindle the dying insurgency. These would ensure that the already militancy-fatigued Indian Army would be sucked into the Kargil sector and J&K internationalised.

But it seems Pakistan made two miscalculations. First, its timing for intrusion went wrong. The Zojila Pass was forced open two weeks in advance, enabling reinforcements to be brought in to block the intrusions.

The second error was over the Indian response. Pakistan thought India would do nothing, just accept the fait accompli. The uncalibrated use of air power was a stunning surprise and the signal about India's resolve to meet the challenge of the intrusions head on.

Was the operation botched?

If this mixed guerrilla force was tasked to carry out deeper missions well beyond the 5 km deep bridgeheads before the Zojila Pass opened, it has failed and some heads will roll. The cat is out of the bag. There is now enough evidence to nail Pakistan's direct involvement in the invasion of Kargil. Many Western diplomats have acknowledged this. After 30 days inside Kargil, the intruders have failed to ignite it as they must have pledged to do. This Pakistani action would show it in its 'rogue-state' light.

India has a single option—to eliminate the intrusions as soon as possible whatever the costs. The Indian armed forces have been ordered to restore the situation in Kargil but without crossing the LoC. The government has authorised the use of the air force again strictly on our side of the LoC. Combined air and ground operations will cap and roll back the intrusions.

So far, Pakistan has reacted only verbally saying it has nothing to do with the intrusions which are part of the indigenous insurgency, calling Indian retaliation

as a defensive measure? These are issues for which Indian military planners will require contingency plans.

The diplomatic option

It is possible that Pakistan may sue for a ceasefire simultaneously guaranteeing it would talk to the Taliban to disengage and withdraw with an assured safe passage. This is somewhat akin to the Hazratbal siege of 1994 when militants were allowed to go scotfree. At that time, the reaction within the army was very strong and totally opposed to the safe passage. The army would be very unhappy to see the Taliban get away.

The Pakistani propaganda is painting Indian action as part of the BJP-led government's electoral compulsion. Pakistan is saying, as on every occasion of war before this, that it is India which has launched the attacks on Pakistan.

Lessons: Kargil 1999

The battle for Kargil will probably end when the Taliban are thrown out behind the LoC. That will no doubt take time. Pakistan's invasion with the Taliban has shaken up an already counterinsurgency-fatigued army. It has also already brought out some valuable lessons. The need for revamping intelligence and surveillance of the LoC. The IAF has been brought into action for the first time since '71 and is conducting live operations in conjunction with the army. They are operating in a restricted environment with severe constraints and achieving results which are largely symbolic and psychological. India has shown some spine. Kashmir is no Kosovo. More Muslims live outside Kashmir than in the tiny state. Kashmir is Indian territory and a nuclear deterrence is in place. The most important lesson of this war is that Pakistan now knows India's threshold in the proxy war.

On India's part, it must devise a strategy to raise the cost for Pakistani misadventures. These have to be deterred. It must also ensure that the caretaker government does not put the army under pressure to hasten the rolling back operations.

Despite the loss of pilots and aircraft, the morale of the IAF is very high. The soldiers in Kargil are no longer fighting a proxy war with one hand tied behind their back. They are glad they are fighting the war they're trained for. •

Maj. Gen. Ashok K. Mehta/New Delhi

Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and Indira Gandhi after the Simla Agreement



India's options

India is perhaps paying the price in Kargil for not being able to raise the cost for Pakistan in its proxy war. Ever since the insurgency was fuelled by Pakistan in 1989, India has failed to evolve a strategy to deter Pakistan from fomenting insurgency. Therefore, India finds itself in a strategic straitjacket.

The nuclear weapon status of both countries restricts the options for escalation to the sub-conventional threshold. Also, both sides are pledged to honour the Simla Agreement especially the sanctity of the LoC. It is for these reasons India can take only defensive measures and keep the Kargil flare-up localised.

Both India and Pakistan are pledged to honour the Simla Agreement, especially the sanctity of the LoC. It is for this reason India can take only defensive measures and keep the Kargil flare-up localised

tion as "hostile action" demanding UN observers and reserving the right to respond to India's use of air power.

There are some imponderables. Will Pakistan carry out encroachments in other sectors to take the heat off Kargil? Will it get the Pakistani Air Force airbor-

Peaceniks proved wrong

The Pak mindset *vis-a-vis* India is too integral to change

FOR THE LAST 50 years, Indian leaders have indulged in sheer self-delusion, dreaming friendship with Pakistan was a possibility, whereas the history of Indo-Pak relations totally negates it. Pakistan's sole objective has been and remains, the destabilisation and destruction of India. From our side, every effort has been made through goodwill and generosity to try and find a peaceful solution to all our bilateral problems. We have been rebuffed again and again.

Each time we had talks and came close to an agreement or understanding, Pakistan went back on its word. The Nehru-Khaliquzzaman talks in 1953-54 ended with broken promises by Pakistan. Again in 1972, after the Simla Agreement, Bhutto promised to settle the Kashmir issue by turning the LoC into an international border. As soon as the promise was made, it was broken. We have now seen the trashing of the Lahore Declaration.

Throughout we have tried to find excuses for Pakistani actions. At first it was the military dictatorship in Pakistan which was to blame. When Benazir was elected, she spouted venom at the UN Human Rights Commission, and every other fora imaginable. Otherwise it was the ISI which sponsored and has carried on insurgency in Kashmir and other parts of India. There was always the feeling the people of Pakistan wanted peace. Lately, faith has been reposed in the business community to bring about a change in Indo-Pak relations. Why has Pakistan not granted most favoured nation (MFN) status to India so far?

Pakistan was a creation of the two-nation theory. The same went for a six when Bangladesh was created. Kashmir remains the last figleaf of the failed two-nation theory. Pakistan can never give up its claim and effort to internationalise the issue otherwise it stands to lose the very *raison d'être* for its existence. It is totally immaterial which section of the Pakistani state is for peace or for confrontation. Pakistan as an entity is determined to harm Indian interests.

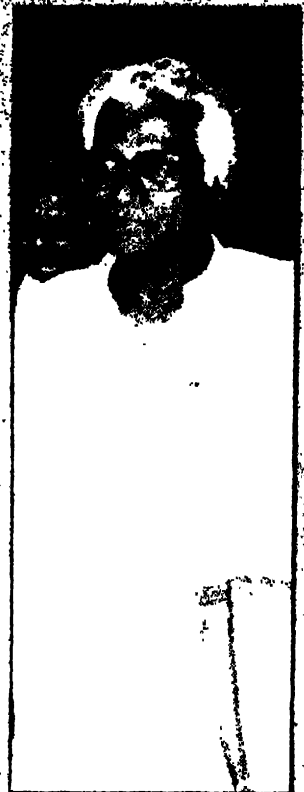
One can understand well meaning souls like I.K. Gujral having gone wrong on Indo-Pak relations. They are guided by sentiment and their personal family history. Gujral's father, the late Lala Avtar Narain Gujral, was the first person to sign the Constitution of Pakistan. Hopefully, the ill-conceived and so-called Gujral doctrine now lies safely buried under the snows in Kargil. Even this band of Pakistani sympathisers must realise by now Pakistan has no interest in candle-light vigils on the Wagah border, but would like to see India go up in flames. However, for the defence minister to put the blame for the present act of war by Pakistan on the army and to absolve Nawaz Sharif and the ISI, is totally bewildering. Perhaps Fernandes is not aware of the Pakistani Prime Minister's antecedents. Nawaz Sharif was brought into the politics of Punjab by his mentor Zia-ul-Haq. He has emulated his guru in every way. Zia always followed a two-track policy towards India — make friendly noises, even show deference towards India, but keep up the hostility.

Unfortunately there has been a criminal draw-down in India's defence budgets in the last ten years. The Indian Army is not what it was in 1971. No wonder Pakistan is boldly following adventurist policies in Kargil. Our defence capability needs to be strengthened with the latest technologically advanced equipment.

Another war between India and Pakistan is no answer, nor desirable. We won our wars and lost the peace. In 1948, Nehru took the Kashmir issue to the UN and in 1972 Indira Gandhi failed to resolve the Kashmir issue. We need to take a leaf out of the US book. The former Soviet Union disintegrated without any military action. The US engaged the Soviet Union in a crippling arms race which led to its economic collapse. The thrust on human rights, freedom and open society did the rest. If we were to increase our defence budgets considerably, Pakistan will find it impossible to match the expenditure. Disaffection amongst the people of Pakistan will increase. There is already considerable unrest amongst the other ethnic minorities — Baluchis, Sindhis, Pathans, etc. We should provide every opportunity for Pakistan to self-destruct. It is about time Pakistan got a dose of its own medicine.

V.K. Grover

(The author is former secretary, ministry of external affairs)



GEORGE FERNANDES

For the defence minister to put the blame for the present act of war by Pakistan on the army and to absolve Nawaz Sharif and the ISI, is totally bewildering

Can India and Pakistan ever be friends?

INDIA SHOULD HAVE KNOWN it was coming. After the euphoria of Atal Behari Vajpayee's visit to Lahore, things had to come down to earth with a bang. They did, and gave ample notice.

Minister for external affairs Jaswant Singh was on a visit to Moscow, Tashkent, etc. when he got news that Pakistan foreign secretary Shamshad Ahmad had unilaterally cancelled talks between the Indian and Pakistani foreign secretaries, scheduled to have been held in May.

Ahmad's grittily-worded statement repudiated nearly all the gains of the Lahore trip. The Indian side believed that the spirit of Lahore and commitments made to friendship between India and Pakistan, would be binding on all regimes, Indian and Pakistani, no matter what their colour or composition. Ahmad's statement implied that this was not so. He cited "domestic instability in India" as the reason for calling off the talks.

The Indian foreign minister was upset and angry. The BJP had fought hard to remove the tag of 'caretaker and temporary' government from its lapels. Now a regime the BJP considered its friend was using this tag as an excuse to call off talks.

Even as the Indians were processing



Back from the

the statement, Kargil happened.

What really caused Kargil? Can the Lahore spirit be revived? Can India and Pakistan ever be friends?

WHAT HAPPENED IN KARGIL?

Authoritative sources in the Government of India told SUNDAY the build-up on the Pakistani side has been going on for the last three months, maybe even while the PM was being feted in Lahore.

"One question that is asked is: why

didn't we know about this earlier? Our answer is: this is not the time for post mortems," said the source. This begs the question whether there was an intelligence failure (that is, intelligence agencies didn't warn the government that Pakistan was planning to strike in Kargil) or a failure in perceiving the pressures and pulls for political power in Pakistan.

Mild explanations were offered for the intelligence 'failure': the Kargil sector hasn't been 'active' for the last 27

years; in the past there have been some incursions from the Pakistani side, some from the Indian side, and that these are almost routine; and as the area is thinly populated, especially the region around Batalik, Dras and Mashkoh valley, it is difficult for locals to sight infiltrators. However, this does not explain how India remained oblivious to the obviously large-scale movement of troops and hardware from the Pakistani side of the Line of Control (LoC) to Mashkoh



not have performed any offensive functions even if it wanted to, was shot at and one of its engines damaged. Instead of returning to Agra, which is where Canberras are housed, it was forced to land in Srinagar.

It is then that India seriously considered using air power, when it was reported back to India that helipads could be seen on the Indian side of the border, and that more than a thousand armed intruders were waiting on the Pakistan side to cross over.

The government says that until India gets its territory back, air strikes would continue. However, there is no question of hot pursuit of intruders. Nor would India let the aircraft cross the LoC. In other words, India didn't want to escalate the conflict, but would certainly not compromise on reclaiming its territory.

IF INDIA DIDN'T WANT war, what was it doing about securing peace? The sources said that the Indian and Pakistani Directors-General Military Operations (DGMOs) had started talking on the hotline to each other soon after the conflict broke out. The Indian DGMO informed his Pak counterpart about the situation and demanded that infiltrations stop. The Pak DGMO feigned ignorance of the incursions and said he would get back to India. This is a usual tactic on the part of the Pakistani military authorities.

Then on 24 May, the two Prime Ministers spoke to each other on the telephone. Pak PM Nawaz Sharif was in Lahore when the Indian PM called him. Sharif was concerned about the military build-up on both sides of the border. A.B. Vajpayee asked Sharif if he had abandoned

brink of peace

heights.

The Indian side first got to know that a build-up was taking place as late as 6 May. It may have begun much earlier. Three weeks later, the Air Force was called in.

And how was the build-up noticed and the Air Force requisitioned?

On 17 May, the ministry of external affairs told the Pakistan High Commission that according to the terms of the agreement signed earlier between the

two countries, India proposed to air-survey the Kargil border and was accordingly informing Pakistan authorities. The air survey would continue till 28 May.

On 19 and 20 May, Indian aircraft stayed in their hangars because of bad weather. On 21 May, a Canberra (the oldest bomber aircraft in the Indian Air Force, not in use in any air force in the world) was sent out to survey the border.

The two-engine aircraft, which could

the spirit of Lahore. Sharif replied that he was totally committed to the Lahore Declaration which made the Simla Agreement the basis for negotiation. "If this is your idea of pursuing peace, we are not impressed. This is not our idea," Vajpayee told Sharif.

Nawaz Sharif said that the DGMOs were in touch on the hotline. But they could also meet each other to discuss the matter. The call ended with a promise from Sharif that he would call again. He

CROSS-CONNECTION



NAWAZ SHARIF

The cellphone rang. An aide to the Prime Minister scurried to one corner of the room and listened intently. He then scribbled something on a paper napkin and handed it to a top government official. The official looked at it and said crisply: "Deny it!" "It has already been done," said the aide.

This happened during a briefing for reporters in New Delhi. What the government wanted denied was news that Pak Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had called the Indian Prime Minister to discuss a proposal to send the Pak foreign minister to India. The news was flashed by the BBC at about 7.30 pm last night. Then why did the government suppress the truth that Pakistan had taken the initiative to break the ice?

Possibly, like other initiatives taken by Pakistan, this one was considered suspect by the Government of India. But whatever the reason, despite repeated questions, the Indian government refused to acknowledge that the Pak PM had spoken to the Indian PM.

Why?



A.B. VAJPAYEE

never did — until 28 May, when India denied he had called (*see box*).

Meanwhile, the Pakistan DGMO called India on an open ISD line and offered to set up a meeting. However, no dates materialised.

An offer to resume foreign secretary-level talks was now received by India after the air strikes started. India is studying the dates. However, Indian sources say this is hardly a propitious time to begin talks.

What are the chances that the conflict will end? When?

According to Indian sources, there is broad agreement that Pakistan had four objectives when it started the incursions:

- It wanted to alter the status of the LoC
- It wanted to cut off the highway between Srinagar and Leh, making Leh inaccessible
- It wanted to try out and open a new route for infiltrators into the Valley and beyond
- It wanted the Kashmir issue to be internationalised yet again

There is photographic evidence of almost all India's charges against Pakistan. India also has evidence that

the political leadership in Pakistan "may not have been 100 per cent aware" of the Pakistan Army's plans for the Kargil LoC. "If the political leadership had been told it may have been briefed (by the army) in general terms, not the specific scope and dimension of the adventure," sources said, buttressing defence minister George Fernandes' assertion that the Pakistani government didn't know what its army had done on the Kargil border.

However, whatever gaps in communication there were, territory wrested from India on those frozen and inaccessible heights will take months rather than weeks to get back. India's problem is: it doesn't want to escalate the conflict, and yet has to fight, using vulnerable air power, close to the LoC. In losing three aircraft India has already paid a significant cost. It will have to reconcile to losing more.

According to Government of India, this conflict will not end quickly. It will go on until Indian territory is reclaimed. And it will not go beyond the LoC. These are India's limits. But these are also its limitations.

DOES THE WAR THEN signal the death-knell of the Lahore Declaration? If the fragmented nature of power in Pakistan can cause so much havoc in its

relations with India (despite the fact that Nawaz Sharif and his party swept the general elections in Pakistan a year ago on the campaign plank of closer ties with India), is the basis of friendship between India and Pakistan more fragile than we thought?

It is hard to say. Talk of a closer relationship with Pakistan at this point is tantamount to heresy and treachery in the public mind. And yet everyone accepts that it is impossible to sustain the white hot heat of passion in the relationship for any length of time. Things have to simmer down.

But in India, as in Pakistan, there is no dearth of people and interests who are saying: "We told you so." A band of RSS workers present at the cremation of Sqd. Ldr. Ajay Ahuja raised anti-Pakistan slogans when his funeral pyre was lit. India's political leadership has to send out signals that indicate that Indians should be ready to talk to Pakistan but also keep their powder dry while talking to them.

Clearly formal agreements — on the Tulbul barrage or on Siachen or on consular and visa matters — are worth anything only if the military and the political leadership of the two countries want peace. At this moment, this is far away. •

Aditi Phadnis/New Delhi



Back to front

The Kargil episode can rejuvenate local militancy in the Valley

IT WAS 25 MAY. People in the Valley woke up to the roaring sounds of helicopter gunships and fighter aircraft. At the outset, few could make out what was happening. But as the day progressed and people switched on television and radio sets, they heard the news which they couldn't have expected even in the darkest days of militancy in the past ten years. The Indian Air Force (IAF) had launched air attacks on positions held by militants in the high ridges of Batalik, Kargil and Dras sectors in the desert region of Ladakh.

Since this was the first time in J&K's history that the Indian government resorted to its toughest option to take on the militants, people in general were no doubt surprised. Tension and anxiety were already in the air. Initial reports suggested that hundreds of highly-trained militants had sneaked into the Indian side of the border and occupied a number of Indian posts along mountain terrain of LoC from Batalik to Dras in Ladakh.

Army authorities, initially, chose to keep the matter close to their heart. But when information leaked out and hit the headlines in the vernacular press, Lt-Gen. Krishen Pal, commander of Srinagar-based 15 Corps, called a press conference and explained that there was nothing "alarming". "It was a local problem that would be tackled locally," he said, playing down the incident which

Before the Kargil conflict, the Valley had turned relatively peaceful. The militants had restricted their activities in the mountains and forest areas. For the first time in ten years, crowds of tourists reappeared on the famous Boulevard Road, Dal Lake, Mughal Gardens

had the potential of flaring-up into a full-scale war between India and Pakistan.

NOBODY IN THE ARMED forces apparently knew as to how and when the infiltrators sneaked into the Indian side and took up positions. At the most, they could wager guesses. "The infiltrators could have occupied these positions either during the last winter or in the beginning of March this year," army sources said. There is hardly any intercept with the intelligence agencies which could give an idea of the infiltration process.

However, it is an accepted fact that the army had vacated these pickets before the beginning of winter. Lt-Gen. H.M. Khanna, GOC-in-C, Northern Command, even went ahead and 'complimented' the intruders for having crossed the LoC in very harsh weather. "They deserve credit as they came up at a time when snow was yet to melt and the terrain was very hostile," he said. "They are highly trained and ordinary

militants cannot fight under the prevailing conditions in these sectors," Khanna added. He also described the Kargil conflict as the "qualitative upgradation of the proxy war" which needed an "upgraded response".

So there it was. And on the very first of the air strikes against the infiltrators, when the army claimed to have killed about 200 militants, a wave of panic engulfed the Valley. Separatist elements in the Valley's political circles looked a demoralised lot. While talking to them, one could easily sense the unease. "We cannot afford so many deaths of militants in just one strike," said a Hurriyat Conference leader.

To him and his ilk, this was a clear manifestation of the Indian government's resolve not to make a compromise on its territorial integrity. "This is discouraging and demoralising," said another leader.

The most important factor which seemed to have affected separatist political and militant forces in the Valley was Pakistan's initial response of "wait and watch" to India's air strikes. This made them feel that the militants had been left to die without any proper logistic support. And the frustration was not hidden. "We are no longer ready to be expendable hirelings to be carted off to death



Syed Ali Geelani: the APHC chairman demanded intervention by the United Nations to avoid a war over Kashmir

fields," said an enraged leader

But in the following days, when Pakistani forces shot down two Indian fighters and the militants also destroyed a helicopter gunship, a fresh wave of cou-

rage and hope was palpable. Even though militants operating in the plains were more or less silent, in the mountainous regions of Jammu, they operated according to a precise calculation.

They blew up two vehicles belonging to the army and the Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) on the Srinagar-Jammu national highway, which is the only surface link between the Valley and the rest of the country. As many as eight personnel, including some senior officers and their relatives, were killed and more than 20 other were wounded in these incidents. This made the government more panicky. It immediately linked up the Kargil episode with the highway explosions. There were reasons for doing so. The Pir Panjal range of Banihal provide direct access to Himalayan mountains of Ladakh through Doda and Kishtwar.

THIS GAVE RISE TO a startling trend. Over the past few years, militancy had taken the back seat. Dozens of militant outfits had vanished from the scene and most of the leaders and groups had preferred to resort to the political process. The Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) — regarded as the pioneer of the militant movement — was first to give up the gun. Under the leadership of Mohammad Yasin Malik, the JKLF declared ceasefire and over time renounced the gun completely. Yasin's camp now includes almost all the top leaders of the political amalgam called the All-Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC). Jamaat-e-Islami, which was regarded as the political face of Hizbul Mujahideen, also distanced itself from the Hizb and opted for political initiative to resolve the Kashmir issue. However, the Kargil flare-up seems to have lifted the morale of militants who were disillusioned with the violent ways. Armed jingoism is, once again, finding favour with a large section of the people to resolve the crisis.

And this back-to-arms tendency is prevalent despite the knowledge about the extent of damage people saw in a war between India and Pakistan. "We know that India and Pakistan are nuclear countries and any war between them could reduce them to dust," said A. Hassan, a government employee. "But it is imperative to settle the matter once for all."

Farooq Abdullah: to reassure visitors to the Valley, the CM appeared on local TV and asked them not to panic as "there was no possibility of a war"



The APHC seemed to be the quickest one to sense the mood. To keep itself close to the people, the Hurriyat called a general strike on 26 May. APHC chairman Syed Ali Geelani demanded intervention by the United Nations to avoid a war over Kashmir. He said the subcontinent was sitting on powder keg and any aberration, here or there, could lead to a devastating war which could have even "global ramifications".

BUT FEW PEOPLE BELIEVE that a political initiative can ever lead India and Pakistan out of the crisis. A generally-held perception is that no leadership in India or Pakistan can ever resolve their pending issues politically. People say it would be naive to think that either India or Pakistan would ever give up their claim on Kashmir.

A reference in this regard is being made to the Simla Agreement, the Tashkent Pact and the more recent Lahore Declaration. The apprehension is not without its reasons. The last 50 years of India-Pakistan history records more than 100 joint communiques and agreements. Almost every aspect of the relationship including defence, Kashmir, releasing POWs, establishing communication links, trade and tourism have been covered by these agreements. "But no one could ever prevent or pre-empt the threat of confrontation between the two countries," says Mohammad Yusuf, a university student.

There can be no denying that the relationship between India and Pakistan has always been guided by Hindu versus Muslim sentiments. It is this sentiment which converts even a cricket or hockey match between the two countries into acts of *jihaad* or *dharam yudh*. In this backdrop, the Lahore Declaration was perceived in Kashmir as yet another "fruitless exercise".

Before the Kargil conflict, the Valley had turned relatively peaceful. The militants had restricted their activities in the mountains and forest areas. After a decade of turmoil, life was gradually coming back to normal. The markets and bazaars were back in business. For the first time in the past ten years, crowds of tourists reappeared on the famous Boulevard Road, Dal Lake, Mughal Gardens, Pahalgam and Gulmarg.

According to tour and taxi operators, over 50,000 tourists — majority of them domestic — came to the Valley in the past two months. But the flare-up in Kar-



Indo-Pak relations have always been guided by Hindu versus Muslim sentiments. It is this sentiment which converts even a cricket match between the two countries into acts of *jihaad*. In this backdrop, the Lahore Declaration was perceived in Kashmir as a "fruitless exercise"

gill has cast its shadow and have made most of them flee.

THE TOURISM TRADE HAS been the immediate victim of the Kargil flare-up. The place is more than 200 km away from Srinagar. Due to severe winter and heavy snowfall, it remains cut off from the Valley for almost eight months in a year. The developments in the region, thus, have little impact on the peoples' psychology in the Valley proper. But when the government closed the Srinagar airport for civilian traffic on 25 May, the action suddenly moved closer home.

The airport was handed over to the IAF who used it as a base to carry out strikes against militants in the mountain

ridges of Kargil. Awantipora, Jammu, Sangroor, Leh and Chandigarh were the other airports the IAF used as their bases.

The tourists are can no more seen on the roads now. Groups of tour and taxi operators, shopkeepers and others working in the tourist trade can be seen waiting by the roadside. "You could see crowds of tourists before the Kargil flare-up here," said a sentry posted at the headquarters of CRPF's 40th battalion. "You don't find them now."

A fleet of over 100 taxis and other vehicles parked in the local taxi stand only proves the point raised by the CRPF *jawan*. Just two cars out of the entire fleet had got passengers for the day. One could see other taxi owners waiting for someone to hail them. Said Ansar Ahmad, a taxi driver, "Our stand has the strength of 90 vehicles. You could not find just one taxi waiting idly for passenger. We would even call 30 to 40 more taxis regularly from other stands as there were crowds of tourists. We are sitting idle now."

To reassure the visitors, chief minister Farooq Abdullah appeared on the local TV, asking them not to panic as "there was no possibility of a war". "They (Pakistan) cannot afford a war," Abdullah wanted people to believe. But the die has already been cast and his appeal has had little impact. •

Rashid Ahmad/Srinagar

With 134 Lok Sabha seats between the states of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and Goa and the Union Territories of Lakshadweep, Andaman & Nicobar and Pondicherry, peninsular India is nearly as much significant electorally as the combined strength of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

But every state, having a distinct political tradition and being a case in itself, has to be evaluated under different parameters. In Tamil Nadu, if politics has been dominated by towering personalities since the Sixties, then it has been more issue based in Kerala.

Similarly, if a national party gets reduced to the status of a regional party in Karnataka, then Andhra Pradesh stands out as the first state to effectively challenge the domination of a resurgent Congress under Indira Gandhi in the Eighties. This has made things difficult for social scientists and psephologists alike as each state's uniqueness has made regional groupings difficult.

Here SUNDAY analyses the likely trends in the southern-most state of Tamil Nadu.

Tamil Nadu

Basic facts

A 'problem' state for most political parties because of the state's ability to spring surprises and come out with a verdict that is contrary to the national trend. This has happened at least on two occasions in recent history: in 1977, during the tidal wave against Indira Gandhi and in 1989, when most of India voted against Rajiv.

The 1998 election

Among the national parties, the Bharatiya Janata Party gained the most. Compared to 1996 when it drew a blank despite contesting 37 seats, the BJP opened its account winning three seats and increasing its vote from 0.92 per cent to 6.86 per cent. Even senior party leaders conceded that the unprecedented growth

Jayalalitha: who will woo her?

Trend specific

A look at those constituencies in Tamil Nadu that might vote along predicted lines



of the BJP was on account of its joining Jayalalitha's AIADMK-led front.

Considerable erosion in the strength of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and its ally, the Tamil Maanila Congress. The DMK's seats went down from 17 to five and the TMC's share declined from 20 to three. Unlike in the past, the DMK-TMC alliance was not wiped out and the two virtually divided the 40.27 per cent vote share that came their way.

Jayalalitha's AIADMK remained the dominant party polling 28.89 per cent of the vote. The remaining allies polled nearly 21 per cent with the BJP, MDMK (Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) and PMK (Pattali Makal Katchi) bagging six per cent each.

The 1999 election

With no trend discernible at this stage, analysts believe that Tamil Nadu is one of the states besides Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra that holds the key this time.

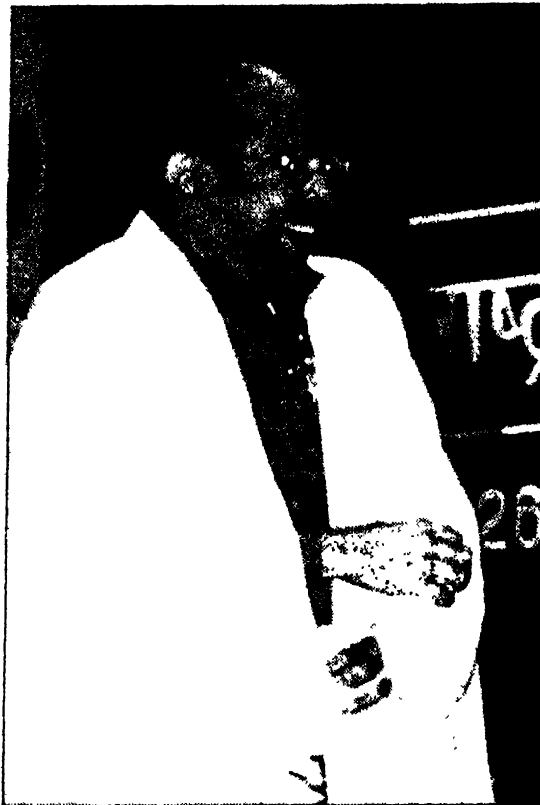
Who will be bestowed on the favour of an alliance by Jayalalitha? While the BJP has made up its mind of aligning with the DMK and the bulk of the AIADMK-led front of last time, it is not clear who will align with 'Madam' and her party. Though the Left has made reconciliatory moves towards the AIADMK, the Congress has remained silent so far.

There is a lack of clarity regarding the direction in which the TMC vote is likely to shift. As of now it is tough to speculate whether the vote will move with the DMK, the AIADMK or return to the Congress fold. The only thing that can be stated for sure is that the TMC vote is unlikely to remain intact.

Chennai (Central)

Normally, the three seats of Chennai do not vote with the rest of the state. This continued even in 1998 when veteran BJP leader K. Jana Krishnamurthi was among those defeated.

Of the three seats, Chennai (Central) shall remain a key contest like always because of the presence of a high-profile candidate from either party. Former union minister Murasoli Maran retained



The final nature of alliances in the state will determine the outcome at Chennai (Central) as any split in the anti-DMK vote would help Murasoli Maran canter home

the seat in 1998 with a comfortable margin of nearly 70,000 votes.

Maran defeated D. Jayakumar, a former minister in Jayalalitha's Cabinet, and also pushed down veteran Congress leader E. Anbarasu who won earlier in 1989 and 1991.

In fact, the noteworthy feature last time was the dramatic fall in vote share of the Congress from 21.1 per cent to 7.58 per cent. The final nature of alliances in the state will determine the outcome as any split in the anti-DMK vote would help Maran canter home.

Tamil Nadu is a 'problem' state for most parties because of the state's ability to spring surprises and come out with a verdict that is contrary to the national trend

Sivaganga

Among the senior TMC leaders whose political future is at stake is P. Chidambaram who will have a tough decision on whether to seek re-election from the coastal constituency of Sivaganga. Victorious in all the elections since 1984, the former finance minister has to decide whether he can do without the support of the DMK that he got in 1996 and 1998.

Even though TMC strongman G.K. Moopanar belongs to the politically dominant Maravar caste, the Chettiar Chidambaram cannot bank on it alone and he will have to look either to the Congress vote-bank that remained a significant 5.74 per cent even in 1998 or elsewhere for support.

However, given the personal hostility — notwithstanding the political differences — between Jayalalitha and Chidambaram, this is one seat that is going to witness a contest that would keep everyone on a razor's edge.

Salem

In the fractured nature of Tamil politics, even Independents or one-man parties



Given the personal hostility between Chidambaram and Jayalalitha, Sivaganga is one seat that is going to witness a contest that would keep everyone on the razor's edge

have been able to find their places under the sun by forging the right alliances.

This was the case of Union minister V.K. Ramamurthy, who after starting out as a Rajiv Gandhi acolyte, chalked out on his own after leaving the Congress with N.D. Tiwari, Arjun Singh and Rangarajan Kumaramangalam. He represents the north-western constituency of Salem, the one seat that witnessed triangular contests and where the division of votes among Congress factions decided the outcome in 1996 and 1998.

In 1996, TMC candidate R. Devadas polled 47 per cent, equal to the combined votes of the official Congress candidate and state unit president, K.V. Thangakabalu, and Ramamurthy who fought on the Congress (Tiwari) ticket. In 1998, though the three locked horns again, the TMC was humbled by Ramamurthy with the backing of the AIADMK and the BJP.

While there is not much reason for Ramamurthy to shift from the constituency this time, the choice of his opponent will be crucial. If the seat witnesses a triangular contest again, the situation could well be to Ramamurthy's advantage.

Coimbatore

Amid the din of Dravidian politics, it is often forgotten that the communists had strongholds in the state well into the Nineties. However, the two communist parties are no longer a significant force and their space appears to have been taken by fundamentalist organisations.



V.K. Ramamurthy: will Salem smile at him?

One such constituency that has witnessed a sea change in character is the cotton-city of Coimbatore that earned much notoriety during the last election owing to the serial blasts in the city.

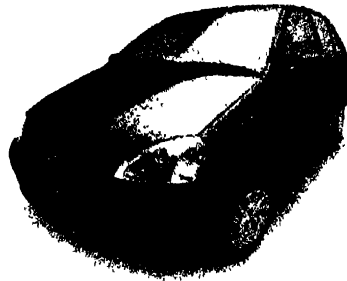
The decline of the communists is evident from the fact that while the CPI(M) polled 32 per cent in the 1991 elections, it allotted the seat to the DMK in 1998.

In the last decade, this constituency saw the rise of both the Hindu Munnani and various Islamic fundamentalist groups. In the early Nineties, Palani Baba emerged as the main symbol of the Islamic groups and after his murder in 1997, the Jihad Committee that was formed by the Baba yielded ground to Al Umma, another fundamentalist organisation.

In 1998, the BJP won by a whopping 1.45 lakh votes — a performance undoubtedly spurred by the serial blasts. The added advantage for the BJP was the fact that its principal adversary was the DMK and the Congress polled a measly 5.06 per cent.

If the CPI(M) decides to field a candidate this time, it will first have to reactivate its party organisation. By all accounts, a tense constituency given the communal forces at play. •

Niranjan Mukhopadhyay/Chennai



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L.K. Advani, Kushabhau Thakre and Atal Behari Vajpayee: remote sensing

Heart of the matter

Uttar Pradesh chief minister Kalyan Singh and BJP dissidents might have called a truce, at least until the elections. But the six-month-old tug-of-war between the two factions has raised a million-dollar question: was it actually a proxy war between Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and home minister Lal Krishna Advani?

The chain of events do suggest that Singh and the rebels enjoyed the patronage of parallel power centres in New Delhi. And significantly, as long as both Advani and Bharatiya Janata Party president Kushabhau Thakre backed Kalyan,

Was the BJP dissidence in UP a proxy war between Vajpayee and Advani?

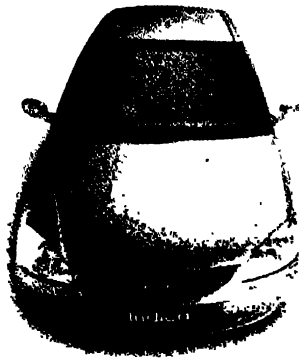
he remained invincible. His detractors, despite Vajpayee's support, could not touch him. But as the situation aggravated, Thakre pulled out leaving Advani alone in Kalyan's support.

The rebels got an edge over the chief minister, who was left with no option but to persuade his blue-eyed controversial municipal corporator, Kusum Rai,

to relinquish her recently acquired office of chairperson of the State Social Welfare Advisory Board (SSWAB). The dissidents were sore over her "undue" prominence at the expense of senior party leaders and ministers.

Kalyan's supporters, however, feel that while Rai had become the rallying point, Kalyan had been an eyesore for the strong forward caste lobby within the party right from day one. A senior minister hinted that the Brahmin lobby led by Kalraj Misra always had designs on the chief minister's chair.

Misra, who had been close to Bahujan Samaj Party leader Mayawati, was angling for the top job when, under a rotation-



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al arrangement between the two coalition partners, Mayawati's six-month term was coming to an end. But just as Mayawati was holding a brief for Kalraj, Kalyan staged a coup on both the BSP and the Congress to forge a fresh alliance and get on to the power pedestal. Raj Nath Singh, who was instrumental in roping in a large number of Thakur MLAs from the Congress, stood by Kalyan all along, much to the chagrin of the Brahmin lobby.

Then came the proposal of a *swabhimaan* (self-respect) rally by the same Kashyap OBC group. While pleading ignorance about the posters, Kalyan insisted on attending the rally, saying, "I gave my consent to address the rally more than a month in advance."

This was construed as an attempt to divide the BJP on caste lines. Tandon, Kalraj and Raj Nath told the party central leadership that "Kalyan Singh's style of functioning would not be tolerat-

believe that persons involved in such activities are not true workers of the Bharatiya Janata Party. An order to immediately wipe out all such graffiti has been issued to the senior superintendent of police, who has also been asked to submit his report to the chief minister after an inquiry."

Govindacharya also held meetings with Kalraj Misra, Lalji Tandon and Raj Nath Singh, who were said to have told him frankly that the root cause of all the trouble was Kusum Rai. He was apprised of the meteoric rise of the small-time party worker, whose proximity to the CM had got her the prized nomination as the SSWAB chairperson in the status of a minister of state. Rai's clout in Kalyan's administration was resented by senior BJP leaders. Besides, she was accused of masterminding the wall writings and posters.

However, talking to newsmen, the BJP general secretary said, "The prevailing dissatisfaction in the party was largely on account of a communication gap; the only solution lies in dialogue and not through correspondence." Referring to statements and counter-statements by the warring groups, he said, "I will talk to all; I've come here to know, understand and learn the problems, not to issue any fatwa."

Rai's resignation followed intensive efforts by Govindacharya for three days. Earlier, sources close to Kalyan had ruled it out. "Knowing Kalyan Singh, I can vouch that he would rather quit himself than compel her to step down," said an aide.

Kalyan's supporters feel that this was done in view of Govindacharya's assurance that disciplinary action would follow against the dissidents as well. "And that was where the party leadership had ditched the chief minister," remarked a supporter of Kalyan.

Govindacharya, therefore, had to air-dash to Lucknow once again. This time, he had to tell the dissidents that enough was enough and that they must stop their tirade against the chief minister.

Surely, the party bigwigs knew that not one of his detractors could match Kalyan's political profile or mass base. But what always helped him to get away with his belligerence was his closeness to Advani.

However, Vajpayee's blue-eyed boy Kalraj continued to give pinpricks to the CM even as he was conferred with the most coveted and lucrative portfolio of



At his Kukrail forest resort press conference on 26 December, Kalyan warned the leadership that "any attempt to remove me from this position would lead to a mid-term poll in the state"

"But the idea of an OBC chief minister remained unpalatable to the Brahmin lobby and this became manifest from time to time," said another backward caste minister.

Kalyan's arrogance and his "I am invincible" attitude made matters worse. Even state BJP chief Raj Nath Singh, who had worked hand in hand to give shape to the present government, fell out with him. Thirty-six legislators handed over their resignations to Thakre and set 15 May as their deadline.

Meanwhile, a poster war was launched by Kalyan's OBC supporters, making the whole affair a backward versus forward castes feud. Some of the posters demanded the resignation of Kalyan's detractors, including Raj Nath Singh and ministers Kalraj Misra and Lalji Tandon. A wall writing threatened to "eliminate all those who were attempting to destabilise Kalyan Singh".

ed any more". In a damage-control attempt, the party bigwigs despatched general secretary Govindacharya to Lucknow on 14 May.

Though the only headway he could make on the first day was cajoling Singh into getting the proposed rally cancelled, the Govindacharya magic wand seemed to work. The chief minister formally condemned the posters and wall writings.

The Kashyap rally cancellation notice was issued by forest minister Raghubar Dayal Verma, who belongs to the Samata Party, an ally of the BJP, and was close to Kalyan.

The chief minister's hurriedly issued statement said: "I fully disagree with the slogan writings scribbled in an objectionable language and manner which have appeared on the walls of Vidhayak Nivas, secretariat and other places. I



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WOMAN IN THE MIDDLE

Profiling Kusum Rai



Kusum Rai: victim of mud-slinging?

After the 'Bahuji' days of the late Kamlapati Tripathi, perhaps it was the first time that a woman had risen from nowhere to emerge as a parallel power centre in Uttar Pradesh.

From a nobody to a municipal corporator was understandable. But having begun as a corporator in 1996, to have shot into national prominence was something that naturally made others envious of Kusum Rai. While initially it was her arrogant ways that put off senior BJP leaders, it was her appointment as the SSWAB chairperson that became the rallying point for dissidents.

With government and police offi-

cials making a beeline for her house every morning, she soon acquired the reputation of one who could get the impossible done by Kalyan Singh. Thus came the marching orders for the Lucknow Development Authority vice-chairman Prabhakar Kumar, who was earlier defended by the chief minister to the hilt.

Rajni Kant Misra, an upright police officer brought to Lucknow by Singh himself, was shunted 300 km away as she found him "insolent". District magistrates, police and other senior officials allegedly sought her "blessings" to get a posting of their choice — and that too for a price.

When she put in her papers after 43 days in office, she alleged that a "mud-slinging campaign" had been unleashed against her by people "who were actually targeting the chief minister". She claimed no closeness to Kalyan Singh, but emphasised her "family relations with Shri Atal Behari Vajpayee".

Her father, the late Mahatam Rai, "was an RSS stalwart who made significant contribution towards building the organisation in Uttar Pradesh" and had been "very close to the late Bhaurao Deoras", she claimed.

Her appointment, by Union mini-

The young woman, having a fleet of three luxury cars, a couple of houses and expensive jewellery, claimed that her appointment "was the result of my hard work"

ster of state for welfare Uma Bharati and Central Social Welfare Advisory Board chairperson Mridula Sinha, "was the result of my hard work", she said.

The young woman, having a fleet of three luxury cars, a couple of houses and expensive jewellery, even claimed that she had contributed significantly towards the election campaigns of Lalji Tandon and Raj Nath Singh.

About the IT probe into her assets, she said that a deputy income tax commissioner, Ashu Jain, who had approached her seeking a convenient posting for his IAS wife, was doing it out of vindictiveness.

public works and tourism. Others, like housing and urban development minister Lalji Tandon and Raj Nath Singh joined issues with Kalyan later.

Kalyan kept his cool for sometime. But once he knew that Advani was behind him, he began to throw his weight around. The first time his differences with Vajpayee came to the fore was on 25 November, when controversy was raised over a government order making recitation of *Vande Mataram* compulsory in all state-run schools.

The chief minister denied before the visiting PM that he had ever issued any such order. Relying on his assurance, Vajpayee gave a similar statement in Parliament. However, education minister Ravindra Shukla's subsequent disclosure that he had actually issued the order with the CM's concurrence, caused utter embarrassment to the Prime Minister. On being reprimanded by Vajpayee for misleading the PM, Kalyan promptly axed Shukla.

It was about the same time that a mysterious raid was carried out in the ancestral home of Ali Mian, a renowned Islamic scholar and president of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board, at Rae Bareilly. While no one was intimidated nor was the house ransacked, the raid at the dead of the night was enough to embarrass the Centre.

Shukla took the lead in raising voice against Kalyan. He even mobilised some MLAs to demand his ouster. A memorandum was also submitted to the party high command. Vajpayee, who had been informed of how Shukla had been made a scapegoat, was understood to be sore with Kalyan over this.

Sensing trouble, Kalyan hurriedly called a press conference under the pretext of announcing his new forest policy at the Kukrail forest resort on the outskirts of Lucknow. There, on 26 December, 1998, he warned the central leadership that "any attempt to remove me from this position would lead to a mid-term poll in the state".

Vajpayee's visit to Lucknow being due the following day, much was read in this remark. "Surely, Kalyan has the backing of someone equally important in Delhi, otherwise how could he embarrass Vajpayee like this?" quipped a minister.

Then followed the controversial appointment of another party functionary, Rajendra Tiwari, as chairman of the state Essential Commodities Corporation. Tiwari had been sacked as chief of

The Govindacharya magic wand seemed to work. The chief minister formally condemned the posters and wall writings. Govindacharya also assured of disciplinary action against the rebels

res on his arrival. More embarrassment lay in store for him when he called on the ailing Ali Mian, who told him that tolerance and compassion were the biggest virtues of any government.

As the dissidence against Kalyan grew, he became more and more defiant and belligerent. It was no secret that the prominent rebels enjoyed proximity to Vajpayee. And it was Raj Nath Singh who managed to turn around Thakre and convince him that it was time for him to act.

Finally, when Vajpayee and Thakre got to one side, it was Advani's turn to silence Kalyan and tell him to call it a



K.N. Govindacharya: the troubleshooter

the BJP Lucknow city unit by Raj Nath Singh on 3 February in the presence of the Prime Minister, who had come here to inaugurate the Lucknow-Sharjah Indian Airlines flight. Vajpayee had barely departed for Delhi when Kalyan announced Tiwari's rehabilitation.

Another showdown came on 28 March, the eve of yet another Vajpayee visit, when Kalyan reopened the Ayodhya temple chapter. He had gone to Ayodhya to announce a special development-cum-beautification package, but went out of his way to say, "I do not think the judicial process will yield any results in the near future." He also vowed to ensure construction of the Ram temple.

Vajpayee was bombarded with quer-

ries. Kalyan not only had to bite the dust and get Kusum to step down, but also had to forgo his demand for disciplinary action against four dissident legislators. Thakre was stated to have told Kalyan that "there is not enough evidence to pin down the dissidents".

According to sources, Kalyan was even given the hint that if he failed to get Kusum's resignation, the leadership would be compelled to take the unpleasant decision of asking him to step down. Kusum gave in to save her mentor.

The party leadership has reportedly told the dissidents to remain silent for now. So there is going to be a lull until the elections. But who can prevent a storm thereafter? •

Sharat Pradhan/Lucknow



RAJ KAMAL JHA



AMIT CHAUDHURI

More Indians are writing in English than ever before. But does that mean a boom in the publishing industry?

WRITERS

It was a happy Mary Mount, managing editor, Picador, who boarded a flight back home to England. She was taking back fond memories, that of the successful launch of Raj Kamal Jha's debut novel, *The Blue Bedspring*. But there was a problem as well.

She was carrying excess luggage — a dozen of the manuscripts she had been inundated with. These were written by a group of young and not-so-young hopefuls — each aspiring to do a Jha, or even better, maybe a Vikram Seth.

"This comes as a surprise to me. The last time I was in India, the writing bug had not caught on," says Mount.

Keen observers of the country's literary climate are not so surprised. Doctors, engineers, housewives, actresses, journalists, admen — just about everyone seems to have a story to tell — and write. The result is a mushrooming of books,

although not all of them make the grade. But never mind — for some it adds the zing to their CV.

Existing side by side with the authors are those who last picked up a book when in college, or sat down to teach their children. One can see them 'having a look' at books in shops and occasionally buying one or two. It pays to be seen reading a novel, especially one which everyone is talking about.

Attending book launches and reading sessions are hot. The crowd often is not very different from those attending fashion shows. Book review columns are hogging greater space than ever in media pages. Authors and their books are increasingly becoming across-the-table topics of conversation.

The publishers are doing their bit to keep pace with the times. The smaller ones are pulling up their socks. Even the till-recently low-profile Har-Anand Publishers is trying to spruce up its covers and organise five-star launches. The bigger ones are talking big. There are a few fresh entrants on the scene.

Like Picador, who although yet to go into full-fledged publishing in India has arrived with a bang as a distributor, with imprints of their novels launched in the UK. The entry has augured well with much-publicised releases like Jha's stark love-and-death novel, Amit Chaudhuri's *The Freedom Song* and Githa Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel*.

Does this mean that there is a boom in the Indian publishing industry? At least, in the field of Indian writing in English? Ponder over the following:

■ The publishing scene in the country, at the moment, is a bit like all glitter with little gold. Few titles have done well. While for HarperCollins a sale of over 10,000 copies is required to qualify for the best-seller category, Penguin makes a generic distinction between pulp fiction and literature. For instance, if a Jackie Collins or a Robert Ludlum sells 10,000 copies it cannot be declared a best-seller. So is the case with Shobha De. Unfortunately, few books sell more than 5,000 and there are more failure sto-



GITHA HARIHARAN

'WORKSHOP

ries than those of success. So, more than a boom in books, there has been a boom in writing. More books are being written than published or sold.

■ Publishing houses like Picador and India Ink who have arrived recently depend more on their international sales than on how they have performed in the domestic market. For instance, though the much-publicised Raj Kamal Jha book has generated good sales in the domestic market, it is its performance in the UK market which is crucial. As Mount says, the foreign market "is a tough nut to crack and if you have done well there, you have arrived" — a yardstick which few Indian authors can measure up to, gracefully.

■ If you think that it is the Rushdies, Seths and Roys which sets the book bazaar afire, you may be quite off the mark. If a combined list of fiction and non-fiction is prepared, it is the gardening and the recipe books whose sales are a notch above those of the celebrated

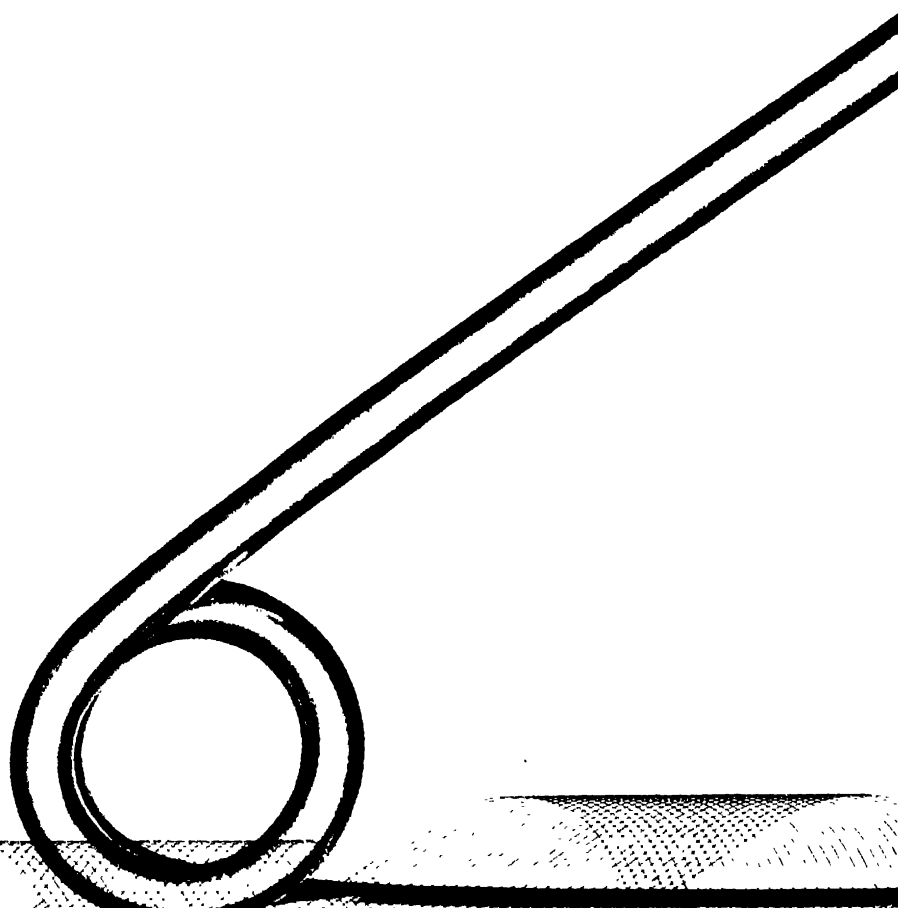
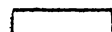
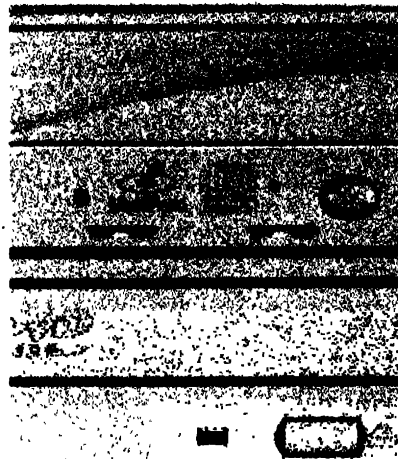
authors. One of the biggest sales recorded in book history in recent times was Karen Anand's book on lean cuisine.


So what's really happening? Plenty, but nothing so earth-shattering as to declare the arrival of a boom. No doubt there is a resurgence of interest in books — new publishing houses are being launched and are doing well (Booker-prize winner Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* came from the stable of India Ink, who opened their account with the book); marketing of books is more aggressive and a more expensive affair than it used to be (it does not get over with just displaying book jackets in shop windows) and packaging of books as a product has become important.

Agrees Renuka Chatterjee, editor-in-chief, HarperCollins. "Though it is premature to talk of a boom, changes are taking place. For instance, what a book looks like has become important — attention is being paid to the quality of paper and cover design. Also, now marketing of a book is given as much atten-

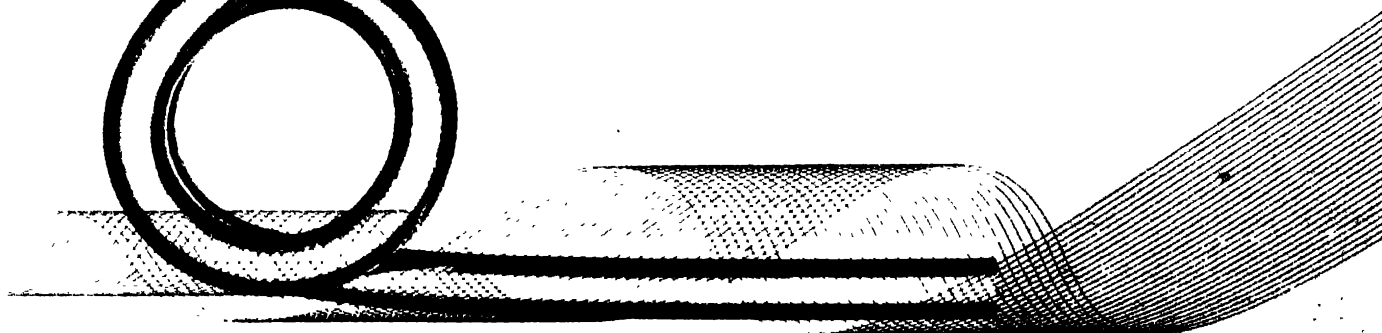
tion as its contents. So you have dozens of mailers, lavish launches — all in all niche marketing. How each novel is released in the market has to be thought of intelligently. Whether these big changes will be translated into a boom remains to be seen."

There is no denying the fact that the prospects look good — both for publishers and authors. Encouraged by the success of big names like Roy and Seth who draw fantastic pre-release publicity and attractive advances, there is a whole lot of aspiring or little-known writers who want to make themselves heard (or read) while the going is still good. Actress, model and VJ Tara Deshpande has arrived on the scene with her collection of stories and verse, *50 and Done*, published by HarperCollins. Pratibha Karan, a bureaucrat, (also former police commissioner Vijay Karan's wife), has released a much-hyped coffee-table cookbook on Hyderabad recipes. The headlines she snatched in leading papers may not have been entirely because of her writing prowess.



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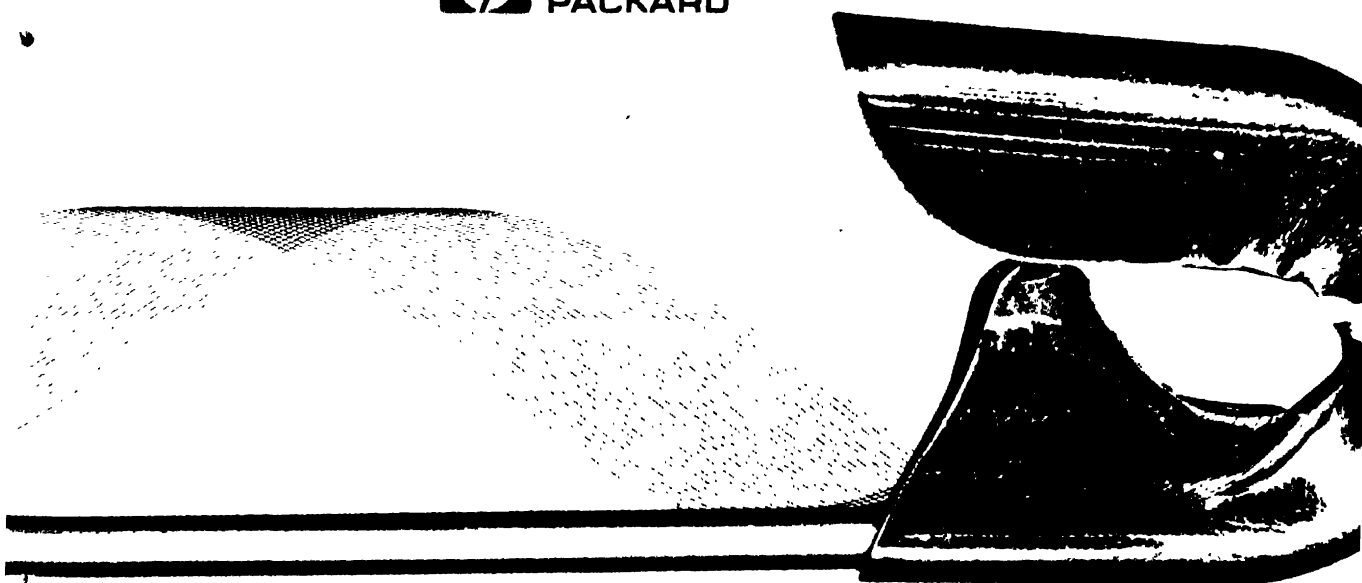
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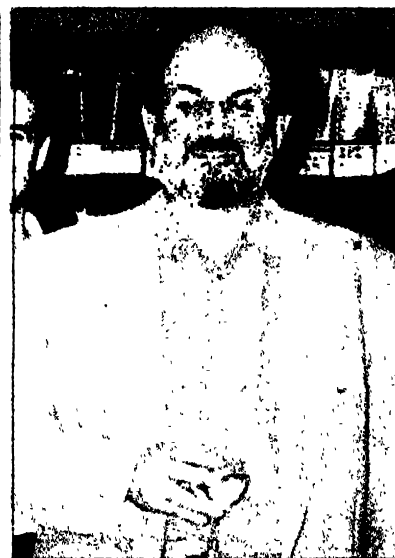
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FAST BUCK

Hefty advances, lavish launches — publishing today is about big money

Big books mean big business. And the figures involved can be astronomical and, at times, unbelievable. More so, in the Indian context, where it is impossible to discuss Rushdie, Seth or Roy without referring to the kind of money they have made.

Raj Karam Jha can rest assured that his second novel will be lapped up by Picador and, for all you know, may trigger off a publishing war — with every publishing company worth its name vying with each other to pick up his next work. For *The Blue Bedspreed*, has been able to generate a desirable degree of interest among readers interested in Indian writing in English, thanks largely to the 250,000 pounds advance that Jha received on the basis of just 20 pages of his manuscript.



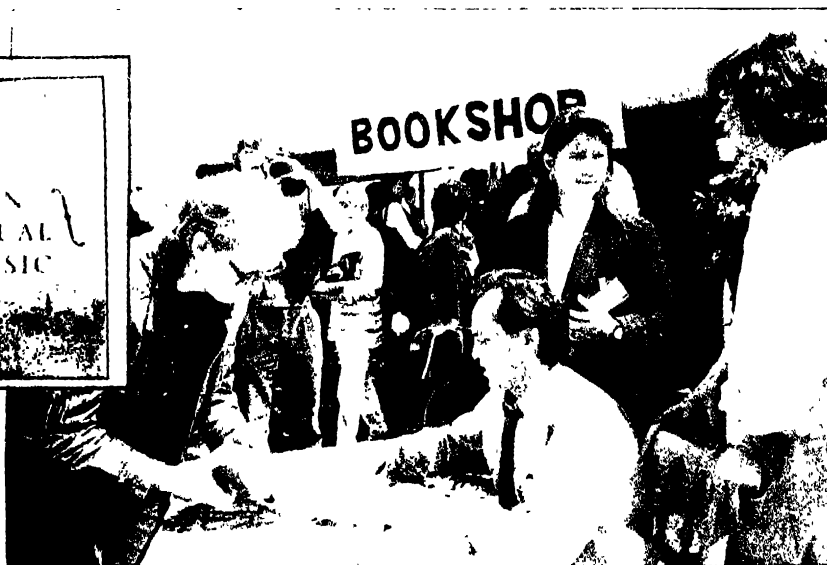
SALMAN RUSHDIE

The inevitable consummation of hefty advances and mega-buck publicity campaigns is a lavish 'launch'.

The launch party may be anywhere — a five-star hotel, India International Centre, Habitat Centre, the British Council (in case, one wants to project the book as one for the select elite). Surrounded by the glitterati and the chatterati, books and authors are launched and their respective literary merits debated. The talking point is, mostly, the advance received by the author. Readings from the book, signing the copies one manages to sell, a few harmless, if inane, questions from the audience — book launches are a routine affair.

In case of a five-star launch, the bill is paid up by the hotel or by the sponsor, if any. The benefit is mutual. Example: launch of Pratibha Karan's book on Hyderabad cuisine was sponsored by Maurya Sheraton, well-timed with the Andhra Week being celebrated in the hotel.

If the book bombs, the story is over. If it is a hit, the party begins all over again. Writing a book may not be all that difficult, but selling it entails a lot of hard work!



VIKRAM SETH

It is common to switch publishers — Githa Hariharan, a HarperCollins fixture, moved to Picador with her latest, *When Dreams Travel*. And the publicity accorded to her has more or less ensured that she will stick with Picador for a while. Similarly, Gautam Bhatia shifted from Penguin to HarperCollins.

As Zamir Ansari of Penguin points out, normally advances are calculated on the basis of the estimate of the number of copies the book is going to sell. The amount is fixed on the royalty to be earned, depending on the price of the book in hard cover.

But when it comes to big and successful names, the stakes are already known. In such cases, the manuscripts are up for grabs and they usually land up with the highest bidder. Vikram Seth was paid an advance of 1,000,000 pounds for his latest fictional work, *An Equal Music*, whereas Salman Rushdie got 500,000 pounds for *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. Pankaj Mishra, (better-known for discovering Arundhati Roy's Booker-winning book) has earned 500,000 pounds for his forthcoming *The Romantics*.

Author and columnist Namita Gokhale thinks that this is an indication of the good times ahead. "There is a lot of good writing happening, which means that more and more people are articulating themselves, and when they do this in terms of fiction, it leads to a boom in publishing."

New publishers like Tarun Tejpal of India Ink are delighted. Following the success of *The God of Small Things*, came Allan Sealy's *The Everest Hotel*, which also attracted the attention of the Booker committee last year. "The attention which books and authors are getting is good — our country needs role models other than film stars and sports stars," says Tejpal. A grand hope, which is not totally unfounded. There is no information on whether James Hadley Chase or Sidney Sheldon were ever mobbed in their native countries, but a Rushdie or a Roy, or even a Shobha De has the potential of stopping the traffic in a nation of hero-worshippers. Of course, a large section of the country's 950 million people, who do not understand the language they write in, cannot be bothered.

But who is complaining about the lack of adulation when there is good money coming by way of advances.

Tejpal feels that writers are finally getting their due by way of better advance money and that this is a trend no different from other professions where salaries have gone up.

Zamir Ansari, general manager, sales and marketing, Penguin, holds a similar view. He feels that there is a lot of loose talk when it comes to advances. In a market economy, the publishing houses are dictated by financial considerations, rather than by charity. Advances are paid only after weighing the pros and cons of the book's potential. "Advances are related to an estimate of the number of copies the book is likely to sell. In most cases, at least with us, the estimates are not misplaced, and so what we pay by huge advances are earned back through good sales. So why grudge good advance payments?" asks Ansari.

Chatterjee points out the flip side of hefty advances. "Publishers like Picador and India Ink have begun a trend which has created problems for houses like us who have been around for a longer time. They pay such astronomical advances to their authors that we are at times under pressure to do the same. The basic signing advance given by Picador is 1,000



ARUNDHATI ROY

pounds, whereas we are able to pay to the tune of Rs 50,000 to a lakh, only to a handful of writers. But, of late, many authors approach us with not only a demand for a high signing amount, but also lavish marketing of their books. This is an unhealthy trend because instead of an emphasis on producing a good book, the stress is on how it is to be released and presented."

But Penguin is not complaining. Points out Ansari, "For any author the most important thing is his book. So he has the right to demand good positioning for the fruit of his labour — that his book is promoted well. And there is also nothing wrong if an author demands a good advance, provided you know that what he will deliver is bound to do well. So why complain?"

Gokhale speaks on behalf of the
ALLAN SEALY



authors when she points out that it is high time that they got a better deal. "Whereas a distributor gets 40 per cent of the sale, an author who has put in all the labour gets only 10 per cent as royalty. Why should an author be left out from the gains?"

It is a question many authors are beginning to ask. And the best part is that publishers are beginning to pay heed to their demands. Boom or not, Indian writing in English is beginning to find a place in bookshops abroad. Being picked up by reputed international publishers and getting whopping advances (which need not mean recovery through sales) is no longer a fairy-tale which happens once in a blue moon.

To come back to Jha, he was paid an advance of more than 250,000 pounds. Ruchir Joshi is reportedly being paid 85,000 pounds by the UK-based Flamingo, for his forthcoming book *The Last Jet Laugh*.

Even as these figures stare one in the face, perhaps it is a trifle early to talk of prosperity in the publishing business. Good advances do not guarantee good sales; rave reviews do not ensure a place in the best-seller list; grand launches do not always jack up the sales. But there is no escaping the reality that a book which hits the stand makes news and the authors make it to the glamour pages of sundry newspapers and magazines. And that some of them are now earning well. It may not be boom time yet for the book publishing industry, but the authors are having it good as long as the media feeds on and plays up their literary attempts. •

Pallavi Ghosh/New Delhi

Self-taught film-maker Ram Gopal Verma has rewritten the rules of mainstream cinema

RAM GOPAL VERMA

When his cameraman walked out of the sets of a Telugu film director Ram Gopal Verma was shooting, he looked around in the crowd and called his still photographer. "Do you think you can operate a movie camera?" Verma asked gently. The photographer readily agreed and the film went on to become a hit. "For the first time in any part of the world, a man who had never held a movie camera before shot an entire film," laughs Ramu.

The still photographer was now in demand as a cinematographer. He therefore begged off when asked to click stills for Verma's next venture. Verma hired another man's services while the still



OFF THE BEA

photographer-turned-cinematographer worked elsewhere as cinematographer. But when the big project fell through, the man returned, asking to be re-hired as a still photographer. But Verma wasn't willing to fire the new incumbent. "When I tried explaining this to him, the man left in a huff. He claims I screwed up his life by giving him a break as a cameraman when he wasn't mature enough to handle it."

A similar thing happened with Chekravarthy, the hero of the phenomenally successful *Satya*. Verma first spotted him on one of his sets, which Chekravarthy was visiting. Immediately, he offered him a role as the hero's friend in his first Hindi film *Shiva* — a superbly-crafted thriller about youth unrest — and next cast him as the hero in *Satya*. But when Manoj Bajpai walked away with all the critical and popular attention for his role in the film, Chekravarthy simply staged a walkout from Verma's life.

Which brings us to Manoj Bajpai, Verma's latest and most sensational discove-

ry (with due apologies to Urmila Matondkar). Manoj would have probably continued playing minor roles in Mahesh Bhatt's productions if Verma hadn't spotted him during the shooting of the ill-fated *Daud*. In this abortive road movie, Manoj played the role of Paresch Rawail's henchman. One day the hawk-eyed director, who would often stare at the lanky young actor, keenly observing him, took him for a long stroll. "I'm making a film about Mumbai's underworld, and I'd like you to play the lead in it," he told the incredulous young aspirant without a preamble or fuss. He had first thought of casting Manoj in the title role, but later felt that the volatile actor was more suited to play the devil-may-'scare' Bhiku Mhatre.

The rest, as they say, is hysteria. In all probability, Ram Gopal Verma has given the South Indian and Hindi film industry more talented actors and technicians than any other film-maker since K. Balachander and Shyam Benegal. Urmila Matondkar was a struggling actress

before Verma launched him in her *Rangeela* avatar. Scriptwriters and technicians like Anurag Kashyap, E. Niwas (now an independent director with *Shool*), Neeraj Vora and music director Sandeep Chowta, who after scoring the much-applauded background music in *Satya* and *Kaun* has just been given a dream break as full-fledged song composer in the Hollywood-style musical *Mast*, are all Ram Gopal Verma finds.

Verma has just returned from a longish stint of shooting for *Mast* in South Africa. The grand musical (probably Verma's answer to Sooraj Barjatya's *Hum Aapke Hain Koun*) stars his favourite actress Urmila Matondkar who has been paired with a young man named Aftab. But even before his first film is released, the boy is itching to fly the Verma coop. "Being Ram Gopal Verma's protege is not something divine. I will always be grateful to him for giving me this opportunity. But I'm not going to be his slave for the rest of my life," he has been quoted as saying in his first-



such an attitude gets on one's nerves."

In any case, Verma isn't sitting around moping about betrayals. He eats, breathes and lives movies. That was the way it was when he worked in a video parlour in Hyderabad. That's the way it is now, when he is making path-breaking genre-defying films which have changed the look, feel and texture of mainstream Hindi cinema and its audience. His very first Hindi film, *Shiva*, in 1989, defined the 'streetwar' genre of cinema. Quickly he moved through a gamut of genres — horror (*Raat*), Hollywood-styled road movie (*Daud*), Bombay-centric gangster epic (*Satya*), whodunit (*Kaun*). He is mortally afraid of becoming repetitive or, worse still, stagnant.

Today he is one of the three most powerful and influential film-makers in India, alongside Mani Ratnam and Sooraj Barjatya. He's constantly making movies, planning them or talking about them. Verma admits he has no friends. "I don't have a life beyond my work. And I don't think there's anything terrible about it. My friends are the current lot of

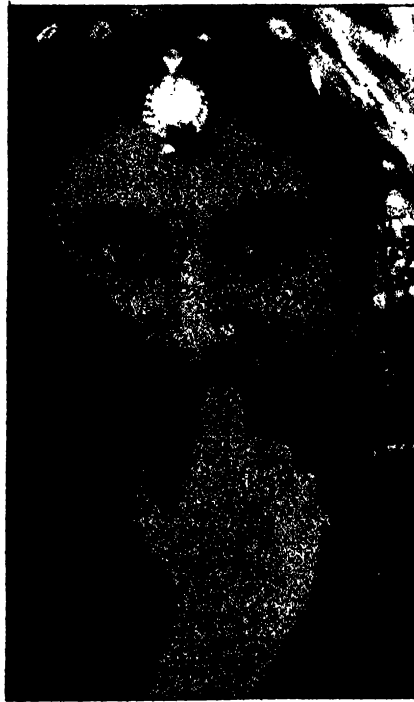
TEN TRACK

ever interview.

But Verma expects no gratitude from his proteges, let alone slavery. "You see, I'm not doing these young people a favour. I need them for my films. Therefore I'm taking them. It's as simple as that," he says, matter-of-factly.

But how does he react to this ingratitude? How does it feel to be given a raw deal by those same people who he helped get their big breaks? "I'm too busy to be bothered with what others think about me," Says Verma. "I think such vicious ambition is prevalent in every walk of life. It's just that it seems much more pronounced in showbiz." And then the practical side of the director takes over. "They suited my purpose professionally. If they suit me again I might go back to them."

But what about Urmila Matondkar? Why does the girl he groomed to glory refuse to talk about him in interviews? "I think it must be very irritating to have the media talking about you constantly only in relation to someone else. I think



people I'm working with. During the making of *Mast*, my art director and I became best friends, trying to break new

Why does Urmila Matondkar, the girl Verma groomed to stardom, refuse to talk about him in interviews? "It must be irritating to have the media talking about you only in relation to someone else," says Verma

ground picturising song sequences."

He is quite passionate about *Mast*. The music by Sandeep Chowta replicates everyday speech in song form, somewhat on the lines of Hollywood musicals like *Bandwagon* and *Westside Story*.

His last film *Kaun* did not do as well as *Satya*. "But the positive side of *Kaun* is that now there are so many low-budget experimental films being launched in Bombay. As many as four leading producers are launching films with Manoj Bajpai in the lead. Like *Satya*, *Kaun* has added another dimension to mainstream cinema."



A diehard movie buff, Verma says he enjoys watching Francis Coppola's *The Godfather* as much as he enjoys *Amar Akbar Anthony*. As for recent blockbusters, he resents the use of gimmicks to arouse popular sentiment. "I just couldn't bear to sit through *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*. I refuse to believe that sequences like Shah Rukh Khan's little daughter offering *namaaz* at the Muslim lady's house, made the film a hit."

Verma belongs elsewhere. "I cannot relate to typical family problems like a father fretting over his son's education, etc. I like to view life from the other side of the firing line. *Satya* germinated in my mind with a thought — what time did the killers wake up on the day Gulshan Kumar was slayed? Did they brush their teeth before going out to kill him?"



One day, Verma told a young small-time actor that he had a major role for him in *Satya*, a film about Bombay's underworld. Manoj Bajpai's arrival marked a watershed in screen villainy

Life in showbiz, fraught with all its insecurities, does not scare him. What does is the thought that an actor of Manoj Bajpai's natural intensity may fall prey to the trappings of stardom. "It's an inevitable process for all actors from Amitabh Bachchan to Manoj Bajpai. Why do you think an actor of Naseeruddin Shah's standing starts looking so jaded to us? It's not as though he's forgotten to act. It's just that we see him in such stupid films that we lose the respect we had for him five or ten years back. You can see his disinterest. I think Manoj is terrific in *Shool*, which my assistant E. Niwas has directed. But I can see that element of artifice creeping into his performance. When an actor becomes aware that he has a reputation to uphold and people are coming to see him perform, then trouble begins."

On a commercial level, Verma feels *Shool* is a far better product than *Satya*. "*Satya* had a complex plot, dwelling on the complexities of the characters' psyche and relationships. *Shool* is a much more straightforward film. It may not shape into a cult film like *Satya*. But it will fall into the category of action thrillers like my own *Shiva* and Rahul Rawail's *Arjun*. I've written the story and produced the film," Verma informs with pride.

Call him a hotshot film-maker, and Verma is bashful. "I don't know about being a hotshot. It all depends on the performance of my next film."

On the anvil are projects starring Amitabh Bachchan and Shah Rukh Khan. But Verma feels it is too early to rejoice. "In my experience, one never knows which picture will run."

The techno-wizard of *tamasha*-ville stumps you when he says he has no formal training in movie-making. "I think people who go on and on about technique don't know what they're talking about. If one has the vision and the clarity required for narration then that's all one needs to make a film."

Verma can recall his favourite films — *Amar Akbar Anthony*, *Sholay*, *Mackenna's Gold* and *The Godfather* shot by shot. "Watching them were my lessons in film-making. Beyond that I know nothing about cinematic technique," laughs the man who has rewritten any number of rules regarding mainstream filmmaking in Bombay. •

Subhash K. Jha/Bombay

Spy story

With China "downloading" US nuclear secrets, how relevant is the CTBT ?



Some have already dubbed it the spy story of the century, perhaps the millennium. The report of the US Congressional Committee, headed by Christopher Cox, on the "sustained and systematic" theft of the most vital American nuclear secrets by China was hot news in Washington even in February. But, sensational, indeed explosive, details of

this document were released only the other day. All hell has broken loose even though only 70 per cent of the report has been made public.

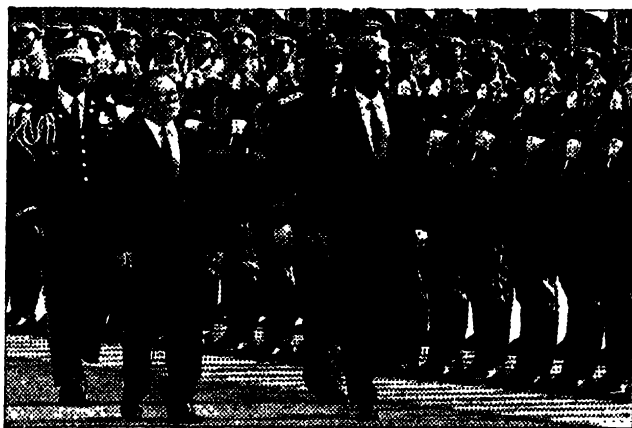
It should not be difficult to guess the report's contents that remain classified. Since the massive purloining of the prized secrets began during the Reagan administration and went on merrily through those of Bush and Clinton, the still suppressed portions of the report evidently underscore that successive administrations have been guilty of looking the other way while weapon designs were being "stolen" with impunity. In short, during the relevant years, the US connived at not only China's nuclear proliferation to Pakistan but also its own to China.

No wonder a great deal of finger-pointing between the Republicans and Democrats has already begun and will doubtless escalate as elections draw near. However, it is the Democrats who are in a tight corner. For, the goings-on at various American laboratories, especially the legendary one at Los Alamos where the nuclear age first began, was first detected in 1995, during Clinton's watch. And yet, until last year nothing was done. Instead Clinton welcomed Chinese President Jiang Zemin in Washington in October 1997 and himself went to Beijing in June 1998 to proclaim that America and China were "strategic partners" in Asia with a special, perhaps exclusive, responsibility to "maintain peace and stability in South Asia".

China has, of course, refuted all the elaborate allegations of the US. Angered as much by the NATO bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade as by the Cox report, it has described the revealing document as a product of the 'Cold Warriors' of Washington.

What no one can afford to overlook is that the most advanced nuclear weapons, including America's proud possession, W-88, which would have taken China many years to develop, could be rolling off Assembly lines across the People's Republic of China very soon. Indeed, according to the US, these weapons could be tested before the end of this year and deployed by 2002.

If so, this would shake the present balance of power in Asia, such as it is, to its very roots, and this cannot but have far-reaching consequences even for countries which are friendly with China, as India surely is and should be. A further complicating factor is that the US, Japan and South Korea have embarked on a programme of Theatre Missile Defence (TMD). China finds it "provocative" and "unacceptable",



Bill Clinton welcomed Jiang Zemin in Washington in October 1997 and himself went to Beijing in June 1998 to proclaim that America and China were "strategic partners" in Asia with a special, perhaps exclusive, responsibility to "maintain peace and stability in South Asia"

especially because it is intended also to cover Taiwan.

China's reply to TMD is bound to be a further intensification and refinement of its missile production schedule with obvious ramifications for everyone in China's neighbourhood. Long-term issues will require long and hard thinking on the part of all concerned. But there is almost certain to be one critically important and immediate outcome of the current state of affairs: the death of the CTBT. Why should anyone sign this treaty banning future nuclear tests when one of the declared nuclear weapons nations is able, thanks to "other means", to produce state-of-the-art nuclear weaponry that would otherwise have required multiple testing?

In fairness, it must be added that the CTBT was already on the verge of dying when the latest disclosures on China's phenomenal success in "downloading" juicy nuclear secrets delivered the *coup de grace*. After NATO's aggression on Yugoslavia, there was no way the Russian Duma was going to ratify the CTBT. This, combined with Clinton's preoccupation with the misadventure in the Yugoslav republic, which has already become subject to the law of diminishing returns, has put paid to all expectations that the US Senate can be persuaded to ratify the dubious document. The earlier pretence that if India and Pakistan could sign the treaty before the end of May, the Senate's ratification would be possible, has become laughable.

At the time of the Vajpayee government's fall, it had become obvious that no decisions on signing the CTBT was possible before the September poll. Now a clear-cut decision not to sign this treaty has become necessary. •

Party of Follo

Finally the breakaway group has a legitimate name: the Nationalist Congress Party. It even has a president in Sharad Pawar (referred to by his followers as CP — Congress president). And Tariq Anwar has got his old job back as the party general secretary. P.A. Sangma is back to doing what he does best: drafting the party manifesto and its constitution. But that does not necessarily mean that he'll stick by it. Does anyone remember the Sangma Committee report he'd written out for the Congress? The one that dealt extensively with the code and conduct of Congressmen.

Datta Meghe has replaced Suresh Kalmadi (and later Praful Patel) as Pawar's right-hand man. So not surprisingly, Meghe has been made treasurer. In Pawar's scheme of things, it's an important job.

That effectively is the sum total of Pawar's revolt: a miniature copy of the Congress.

Initially, Pawar had wanted to call his party the Indian Nationalist Congress [INC] (and thereby confuse the voters by having another INC on the electoral rolls), the Election Commission refused to oblige. And to his horror, Pawar discovered that there are over 50 parties with the word 'Congress' affixed to them. Now he's hoping to wrest a symbolic association with the real Congress by asking for a '*charkha*' as his party symbol. In fact, during his press briefings, a green, white and saffron flag (with the *charkha* imprinted on the white stripe) flutters in the background.

This has created a great deal of indignation within the Congress. A delegation of three senior party leaders led by Ahmed Patel met the Election Commissioner and complained; both about the name and tricolour flag. They alleged that this would create confusion in the minds of the voters — which is precisely what Pawar and Co. are hoping.

So far so good. But — what next?

Pawar had promised that there would be other Congressmen who would be following suit. Perhaps, even one working

committee member. But he was at pains to emphasise that this would not be Sitaran Kesri, contrary to what newspaper reports had been suggesting.

One week later, let alone a working committee member, Pawar could

not even say for certainty whether his one-time loyalist Praful Patel would be joining him. He had better luck with MLAs however. As many as 29 out of the 78 Congress MLAs have come out openly in Pawar's favour, and 15 more are expected to follow suit.



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In Sharad Pawar's new party everyone is a chief, but there aren't too many Indians

Sangma has had better luck in Meghalaya. He is said to command the loyalty of as many as 21 out of the 25 Congress MLAs. In fact, this could, in effect, change the balance of power in the state as the Congress is currently supporting the ruling United Democratic

Party (UDP). Hence, while everyone is focussing on Maharashtra, it will be Sangma's home state that will be the first to feel the direct effect of the split. Especially, when the NCP replaces the Congress as the ruling party in Meghalaya.

At the Lok Sabha level, there is not much scope for the NCP as it sends only two MPs to the Lower House. And while Sangma may win his own seat

Initially, when Sharad Pawar broke away, he had hoped to win as many as 50 seats in the next Lok Sabha. But as of now, it doesn't seem as if the NCP will get more than 15 MPs, with the bulk from Maharashtra

back (from Tura), he has little influence over the constituency (Shillong).

Which leaves Tariq Anwar. It is no secret that he won his current seat with Laloo Yadav's help. Unfortunately for Anwar, Laloo needs the Congress and so he may not be able to help his friend out this time. Unless Anwar joins the Samajwadi Party. But Anwar says he is quite happy where he is, thank you. Which leaves the Samata Party option open to him.

But that has not stopped his former mentor, Sitaram Kesri from trying to orchestrate Anwar's return to the Congress. According to the deal currently being negotiated by Kesri, on the eve of the elections, Anwar would return to the Congress saying that he is disillusioned by Pawar; and that the NCP does not have the support of the minorities. Which would damage Pawar's secular credentials somewhat. But is Kesri acting on his own initiative or does he have Anwar's go-ahead? Specially since Tariq denies it. "Is kahani mein koi jaan nahin hain," he said with a laugh.

More to the point, if he chose to return

(From Left) Sharad Pawar, Tariq Anwar and P.A. Sangma: will the smile last?



Dinner Diplomacy

Gurudas Kamat hosts a dinner. And Sharad Pawar is not invited

During every AICC session, Gurudas Kamat, the Congress MP from Maharashtra, holds a dinner for the delegates from his state. He had hosted one just six months back (in December last year), and this time was no exception; but everyone acknowledged the difference.

Last time around, it was Sharad Pawar who held sway. He sat at the centre table and the rest hovered around, waiting to grab a chair near him the minute one fell vacant. But not many got up once they'd got a seat at the hallowed table. Pawar sat and chatted with the likes of Ghulam Nabi Azad, Najma Heptullah and the BJP's Pramod Mahajan. (Both Kamat and Mahajan posed for the cameras and reassured the guests that they may be political opponents — Kamat had defeated Mahajan during the last Lok Sabha elections — but they were still friends.)

Even Tariq Anwar was present, standing in a corner chatting to his friend from Maharashtra, Vilas Muttanwar — a Pawar-baiter. And though, Praful Patel (a name that was closely associated with Pawar until recently) was present, he spent most of the time talking on his cellular, probably making plans for the evening ahead.

During the dinner last week, there was a perceptible change in both the agenda and the guest list. For one, there was no sign of Sharad Pawar. And since Kamat had been one of Pawar-loyalists until the latter broke away, most of the guests ribbed him about this. "I was wondering if I would find Pawar here," joked Azad good naturedly. In fact, Azad has also been close to Pawar and during a television interview, he was asked to explain why he had not supported Pawar when he owed him his Rajya Sabha seat.

"I am not a Rajya Sabha MP from Maharashtra," retorted Azad. The interviewer had got his facts wrong; but most tend to perceive Azad as a Pawar groupie. It was to dispel this notion that Azad was one of the first to ask for disciplinary action against Sharad Pawar.

And of course, there was no sign of Tariq Anwar at Kamat's dinner. Also missing was Praful Patel with his cellular. Which led to a lot of speculation, as most wondered whether he would cross over or stay on with the Congress. Ram Pradhan told the others that he had received a call from Patel that morning assuring him that he was with Sonia Gandhi, even though he could not make it to the session. But then, as reporters pointed out, Tariq Anwar had received a similar call.

And this time round, Azad sat in a circle comprising Manmohan Singh, M.L. Fotedar, Ram Pradhan and Rajesh Pilot. The conversation very predictably veered around Sonia Gandhi's speech at the AICC (what else do you expect from Con-



SHARAD PAWAR: *Notable absentee*



GURUDAS KAMAT: *The host*

gressmen?) and of course, how magnificent she was: "Just like Indiraji."

Another new face was Suresh Kalmadi who had just announced his return to the Congress, now that Pawar had left. Reporters warned Kalmadi about the 'code of conduct' that had been adopted by the Congress since he had left the party. Dressed in a khadi-kurta pyjama, Kalmadi, however, looked dressed for his new role.

The guest list may have changed since Kamat's last dinner. But one thing remained the same: the caterers. Ironically, it is the same van that is parked outside Datta Meghe's house a few kilometres away, where Pawar's party holds its daily media briefings. So, is Praful taking political lessons from Gaylord Caterers! •



Sonia Gandhi: closing the door for the rebels



All three — Anwar, Sangma and Pawar — know only too well that once they had attacked the party icon, there was no point in returning to the Congress

to the Congress at this juncture, he would have to grovel. And so far, Anwar has always spoken his mind, right from the very start when he refused to sign the CWC resolution nominating Sonia Gandhi as party president. Initially, N.K.P. Salve and Santosh Mohan Dev had also approached 10 Janpath to work out a rapprochement for Pawar and Sangma respectively. But Congressmen say that this offer was rejected outright. For their part, the two rebel leaders deny that they had sent any such feelers. "Santosh Mohan Dev did call me when I was in America," said Sangma at a press conference on his return. But denied that he had asked Dev to smooth things over with Sonia.

All three know only too well that once they had attacked the party icon, there was no point in returning to the Congress.

Initially, when Pawar broke away, he had hoped to win as many as 50 seats in the next Lok Sabha. But as of now it doesn't seem as if the NCP will get more than 15 MPs, with the bulk from Maharashtra. However, if Pawar is successful in tying up with other parties such as the

Trinamul Congress, the Telugu Desam, the Samajwadi Party and the Samata, he could be in command of a sizeable chunk of MPs. And, as the leader of the third largest block, he will be able to drive a hard bargain for himself and his comrades.

The NCP's stand of remaining equidistance from both the BJP and the Congress is calculated to win over such potential allies. But no one of consequence has come forward so far. The daily briefings at Datta Meghe's residence at 10 Bishambar Dass Marg in Delhi (that's the NCP's answer to the Congress party's No 10), attract more slogan-shouting groupies than leaders of any calibre. Last week, Anwar was reduced to reading out lists of names of the various 'no bodies' who had signed up.

This does not, however, stop the press from asking Pawar questions about Kargil and Indo-Pak relations. After all, as the leader of a national party, he should answer questions of national importance, say reporters with a laugh. But Pawar takes his role as the head of a national party very seriously. At the all-party meeting called to discuss the situation in

Kargil, Sharad Pawar represented the NCP. Quick to seize the moment, the *Aaj Tak* crew made the Prime Minister stand in between Natwar Singh and Sharad Pawar and pose for a shot. Both Pawar and Vajpayee seemed to enjoy the joke, while Singh looked visibly upset.

In fact, Sonia's absence at the all-party meet raised a few eye-brows, with BJP leaders commenting that perhaps the Congress president was not interested in matters of national security. Congressmen defended their president by saying that Sonia did not attend the meeting, because she was not a Member of Parliament. But, she is the CPP leader, retorted the BJP, unfazed. In the end, Sonia did go across to Race Course Road for a 20-minute meeting with the Prime Minister.

And for once, Sharad Pawar did not have to handle the uncomfortable questions. While his erstwhile colleagues had to defend their leader's absence, all Pawar had to deal with were questions on Indo-Pak relations.

Perhaps that is why he left the party. •

Priya Sahgal/New Delhi

CALL NO

The revised telecom rates will mean a mixed bag of opportunities for private operators and DoT. And there are incentives for the consumer as well



When the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) announced revision of telecom tariff in March this year, it was clear that the customer would be the beneficiary. While the industry congratulated TRAI for a job well done, parliamentarians cried foul.

The new tariff was to come into effect on 1 April, 1999, but the government sought time to clarify a few doubts and then sought more time to upgrade its software, whereupon private operators also sought some more time for implementation of new tariff. As a result, the new tariff became effective from 1 May, 1999.

The tariff announced by TRAI was a mixed bag of opportunities to increase revenue for both private operators and the department of telecommunications (DoT). This was the first time telephone tariff was being fixed by TRAI. Till now, DoT has been fixing rates.

It proposed a level of 40 per cent increase in phone rentals for both rural and urban subscribers. However, the telecom watchdog reduced long-distance domestic call rates by 45 per cent and international calls by 50 per cent in stages, over a three-year period.

By announcing a level, TRAI had ensured that operators were free to fix rentals of their choice, but not more than the level announced by it. Announcing the new telecom tariff, TRAI chairman S.S. Sodhi predicted, "The new proposal will boost telecom services in India. The usage of fixed telephones will go up even though rentals have been hiked."

There was steep hike in rentals of cellular and paging services as part of the new tariff regime. Monthly rentals of cellular mobile telecommunication services were hiked from Rs 156 to Rs 600 while bringing down airtime tariff to Rs 6 per minute, a third of the then existing rate of Rs 16.80 per minute.

"The increase in rentals will lead to loss of some subscribers but it will be compensated by more air time usage. The move is in line with the proposals made by TRAI in September last year," commented Sunil Mittal, chairman of Bharti Group, after the new rates were announced.

For paging service providers, a monthly rental of Rs 300 was fixed for alphanumeric pagers and Rs 175 for numeric pagers against the current rate of Rs 250 and Rs 150 respectively.

One of the major announcements made by TRAI was reduction of rates in long-distance calls. These will be cheaper by 45 per cent over a three-year period. In the first year itself, rates will be

cut by 23 per cent. The new peak-hour rates would be calculated at the pulse rate of 14 seconds for distance up to 200 km, five seconds up to 500 km, 3.5 seconds up to 1,000 km and 2.5 seconds above 1,000 km.

With the implementation of new tariff rates, international calls would also become cheaper. The charges per minute for calls made to South Asian



W!

and neighbouring countries will be cheaper by Rs 12 and would cost Rs 30 against Rs 42 per minute. This would further come down to Rs 25.20 in the second year and Rs 21.60 in the third year. For Africa, Europe, the Gulf, Asia and Oceania, the charges per minute would be Rs 49.20 in the first year against the current rate of Rs 70. This would further come down to Rs 40.80 and Rs 32.40 in the second and third years.

The calls made to Africa, Europe, the Gulf, Asia and Oceania will also be cheaper. The tariff per minute for calls to these countries would be Rs 49.20 against the existing rate of Rs 70. This tariff will be further reduced to Rs 40.80 per minute in the second year and Rs 32.40 per minute in the third year.

RUPINDER SHARMA



CELL TALE

Enter

- Standard airtime rates slashed
- Lower STD/ISD charges
- Incoming calls free from August
- Lower airtime for pre-paid subscribers

AirTel

125 free call units to rural subscribers and 75 free call units free to urban subscribers (TRAI recommended 75 free call units to rural subscribers and 60 free call units for urban subscribers)

DISCOUNT ON USAGE AMOUNT

Rupees	Per cent
0-1000	5.0
1001-3000	7.5
3001-7500	10.0
7501-15000	12.5
15001+	15.0

15% discount on all STD calls within the state of MP. Value added services like call waiting, call forwarding

Calls to the American and Western hemisphere countries would now cost Rs 61.20 per minute as compared to the current Rs 84. This would come down to Rs 49.20 and Rs 40.80 in the subsequent two years.

While telephone customers of DoT and Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited (MTNL) were happy to get the same number of free calls and the rentals as existed before, the reduced long-distance rates were a bonanza for them. Not to be left behind were the private telecom operators. The basic operators in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh immediately announced a number of special schemes, while the cellular operators in the country announced slash in air time and increased rentals.

Bharti Telenet, the first private fixed-line telephone service provider in the country, introduced a revised rate for its customers in Madhya Pradesh. The company, offering telephone services under the brand name AirTel, announced a 15 per cent discount on all STD calls made

within MP over and above lower STD rates recommended by TRAI.

A special 5-15 per cent usage discount for all subscribers from the first call onwards valid on local, STD and ISD calls — over and above STD discounts. Further 125 free calls for rural users and 75 free calls for urban subscribers have been offered. The company also offered a monthly rental ranging from Rs 75 to Rs 250 per month. It also offers many value-added services like Call Forward No Reply, Three Party Call Conference Service and a few of which are being offered for the first time in Madhya Pradesh.

As a result the fixed-line service users in Madhya Pradesh are now enjoying the benefits of telecom liberalisation. Mr Bhagwan Das Khurana, executive director and CEO, Bharti Telenet, said, "AirTel's tariffs have been designed to encourage more and more people to use fixed-line services. We have gone beyond the TRAI recommendations in passing the benefits to our people of Madhya Pradesh."

As a result of which DoT is also expected to soon make a remarkable change in its rates. More importantly, it was the change in functioning of the officials, from linesmen to the chief general manager. Officials became proactive. The department gave the linesmen pagers to attend to the faults with minimum delay. DoT took special attention not to lose its high-end customers, the corporate and business houses.

"We were surprised to see senior DoT officers visiting a subscriber for installing a phone after the announcement of new telecom rates, particularly in Indore and other places. It is a tough competition for us, with improved quality of service and competitive rates from DoT," said a senior executive from AirTel.

It did not take much time for both MTNL and DoT to realise that basic private operators in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and other operators where they had started operations were poaching on to its high-end customers. For example, Hughes Ispat in Maharashtra has been chipping away its customer base by hard-selling its suite of services and adopting customer-friendly approach.

In order to improve its image, MTNL and Mumbai telecom circle under DoT have set up a committee to monitor the functioning of its officials. They have also appointed a special officer to educate its officials to be more consumer-friendly.



V.C. RAI, MD, Ushafone

"A customer who opts for DoT's fixed-line phone under its Own Your Telephone scheme, has to wait for months. While with us it's almost instant connection"

"We have been drawing up our strategy for over a year. The pressure to come up with a counter strategy grew after some major corporate customers opted for a private operator to meet some of their requirements, especially of Internet connections," a senior MTNL official said.

Mumbai telecom is also planning to introduce a 128 kilobits per second line to meet the growing demand for a reliable and efficient network. The panic reaction of both MTNL and DoT is not due to fear of losing local customers but the corporate clients.

Both DoT and MTNL now plan to offer rebates to bulk users and corporate houses. They also plan to cut the shifting charges in different circles. The minister for communications has already emphasized the need to give additional powers to the telecom circle heads. This will help them to decide tariffs for value-added services like Internet, Intelligent Network services, and voice mail. "The move will help us to decide about the kind of tariff which can be offered to different types of customers. Since long distance telephoning services will also open up by 1 January, 2000, more autonomy to us will be a boon for our (DoT's) customers," said a chief general manager of a southern telecom circle.

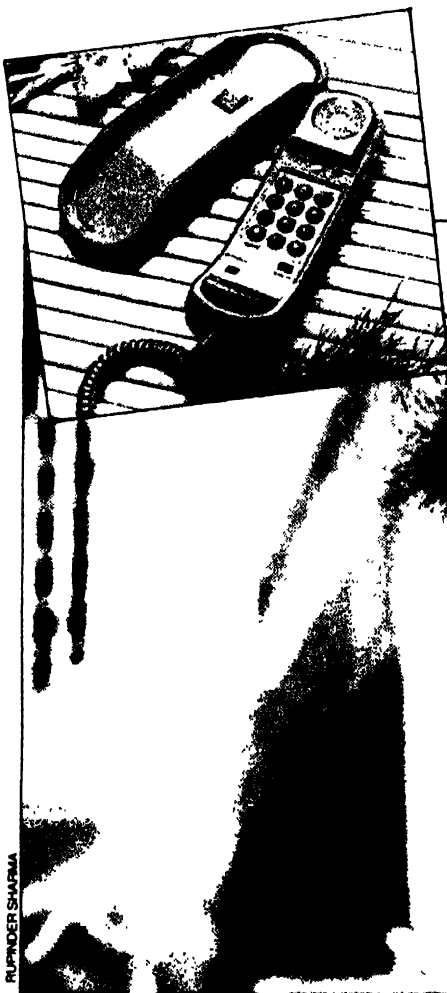
DoT, in its nine circles, offers rural subscribers a monthly rental of Rs. 50

and 80 paise for a call, against TRAI's recommendation that they pay Rs 70 as monthly rental and a differential rate of 80 paise or make up to 500 calls a month and be charged Re 1 for all calls beyond that.

While Urban telephone users with DoT will pay a monthly rental of Rs 25 and 80 paise per call upto 200 calls a month, Re 1 per call for calls beyond 200 but within 400 per month and Rs 1.20 a call for calls beyond 500 a month; TRAI had recommended doing away with the 80 paise rate and charging Re 1 for calls upto 500 a month and Rs 1.20 beyond 500 calls.

Similarly, the cellular telephone operators in various circles also introduced new tariff rates in their circles of operation. Koshika Telecom Limited, which offers mobile cellular services in Uttar Pradesh (west), Uttar Pradesh (east), Bihar and Orissa under the brand name Ushafone, introduced a package to take on the basic operators, DoT.

The company was the first to offer the lowest cellular rates (at Rs 2.70 paise) ever before the TRAI rates were announced. It now launched a unique package in the three circles. The subscribers had to pay Rs 10,000 for a connection, which includes the Rs 2,300 refundable



RUPINDER SHARMA

deposit money and a rental of Rs 250. The balance amount was to be adjusted against the airtime used by a subscriber at Rs 1.20 per three minute. But there is a catch — a subscriber has to purchase the phone that can cost anywhere between Rs 10,000 to Rs 30,000. According to Dilsher Singh who heads the corporate affairs of Ushafone, "Cellular mobile phones are available as cheap as Rs 7,000 in the grey market." But customers beware. The operators will not offer any guarantee of call completions on such phones.

The company's managing director, V.C. Rai, said, "The scheme not only gives a subscriber the low rates of fixed phone of DoT, but also offers him an added advantage of mobility. A customer who opts for a DoT's fixed-line phone under its Own Your Telephone (OYT) scheme, has to wait for months, has hassles with the linesman, suffers bad line quality. While with us it's almost instant connection, mobility and high call completion and all-weather phone at rates of the fixed phone."

Escotel, the cellular service providers in three states of Haryana, Kerala and Uttar Pradesh also brought down its airtime rates to Rs 6 per minute (10 am to 9 pm) and Rs 5.70 (9 am to 10 am)

TRY AGAIN

DoT

Rural subscribers: a monthly rental of Rs 60 and 80 p. for a three minute call.

Urban telephone users: a monthly rental of Rs 250 and 80 p. per call up to 200 calls a month. Re 1 per call for calls between 200 and 500 per month. Rs 1.20 a call for beyond 500 calls a month.

TRAI

Rural subscribers: a monthly rental of Rs 70 and a differential rate of 80 p. for up to 500 calls a month. Re 1 for all calls beyond 500.

TRAI had also recommended doing away with the 80 p. rate and charging Re 1 for calls up to 500 a month and Rs 1.20 beyond 500 calls.

from Monday to Friday. The rentals remain at Rs 600 per month and no charge on incoming calls.

Both cellular operators in Delhi,

Essar Cellphone and Bharti, announced almost identical rates to woo more customers. Bharti now offers Rs 6 per minute, which is about 64 per cent lower than the existing peak hours tariff of Rs 16.80. The rate will be effective from 10 am to 9 pm. The concessional rates were introduced at Rs 5.75 per minute between 8 am and 10 am and 9 pm and 12 am. The lowest airtime rate, at Rs 4 per minute, will be charged for calls between 12 pm and 8 am. AirTel's concessional tariffs, at Rs 4 per minute, are almost 33 per cent lower than the standard hour tariff.

Essar was not to be left behind. The company announced a flat airtime rate of Rs 6 per minute between 10 am to 9 pm. It also offered a concessional tariff at Rs 5.75 per minute between 9 pm and 12 am and between 8 am and 10 am. It introduced a happy hour concept, offering the subscribers an airtime at Rs 4 per minute, during 12 midnight to 8 am.

Chief executive officer of Essar Cellphone, Eric Buerkler, said, "We believe that the new airtime rates would go a long way in significantly bringing down the cost of ownership of cellphones."

In the days to come, the price strategy will become more innovative; with more competition as the other few private operators who are yet to launch their services, will also join the bandwagon in other telecom circles. The private-sector competition all over India should lead to a phenomenal growth in quality of service and an average customer is likely to enjoy the best services offered. Till now available to a privileged few.

TRAI has successfully completed its duty of revising the telecom rates for the first time after it was constituted in 1996. However, the responsibilities of the telecom watchdog does not end. It also has the responsibility to monitor that customers get the best of services promised by the operators.

Such an activity to understand the needs of customers and control the quality of service currently being offered has already been launched all over the country by TRAI. However, it has been observed that only the corporate service providers and a few consumer organisations attend these open houses organised by TRAI. It would be in the larger interest of customers to participate in such open houses to get the best quality service from the service providers, both private and government. After all, they are paying for the service. •

M. Rajendran/New Delhi



**S.S. SODHI, chairman,
TRAI**

"The new proposal will boost telecom services in India. The usage of fixed telephones will go up, even though rentals have been hiked"

BOOK

OF THE WEEK

At the receiving end

A book which challenges the very assumptions of 'development'



The Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives (ARENA), a 'regional network of scholar-activists, progressive academics and critical writer researchers' must be applauded for their commendable effort to raise the voice of the 'victims of development in Asia'. *The Dispossessed* is a 480-page collection of

numerous events, most of them well-known, both locally and globally, and will go a long way to challenge the very assumptions of 'development' that has been dictating the majority of social, economic and resource management decisions throughout the world.

The book is divided into 10 chapters. One each on China, India, Japan, Malayasia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, South

Korea, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Each country is introduced to the reader through about half a dozen case studies. For China, the case studies include Three Gorges Dam, Zhilli Factory fire, flood devastation; for India such studies include Bhopal gas leak, Baliapal missile test range, Chilka shrimp farm. Similarly, for Japan, the case studies are on Minamite tragedy, Narita airport and Teshima dumpsite; and Kerpan prawn farming, logging in Sarwak, Asian rare earth radiation hazard for Malayasia. Pakistan's entry includes canal irrigation system and industrial pollution. Lyari dumping and Chotiari reservoir.

I shall not comment on the choice of events because a closer scrutiny will enable the reader to hear a sound — that of a knife being quietly sharpened. The hidden genocide that continues to take place under the cover of development. Indeed, 'development' and 'democracy' have been the most reliable refuge for those who rule the world. This act of plunder in the name of development is uniform in all the countries studied here, irrespective of the fact that the economic order prevailing in such countries has been a mixed basket. We have capitalist economy, socialist economy, mixed economy and so many shades in between. None of such differences mattered when it was the question of protecting the interest of the victims of development — they were dealt with profound neglect and dishonour in every place. Thus China has the world's highest acid precipitation and two of its cities are among the seven highest polluted cities in the world. Whereas, in Japan, since the Fifties, incidents of widespread industrial poisoning have been occurring with unfailing regularity. There is any number of similar testimony punctuating the entire book.

The book has particularly examined the issues of 'industrial malfunction' and 'environmental degradation'. Industrial malfunction is most vividly discussed in the Bhopal gas leak episode. A few thousand sleeping citizens were choked to death by the designs of Union Carbide. The country's decision-makers compromised in favour of the multinational giant to hoodwink the victims, betray their cause and deprive



A few thousand were choked to death in the Bhopal gas leak tragedy. The country's decision-makers compromised in favour of the multinational giant to hoodwink the victims

them of their legitimate due. What would have been an appropriate summary of the Bhopal episode and what this book is unable to recognise is the worst historic surrender on the part of our countrymen by not being able to boycott Union Carbide products.

The discussion on 'environmental degradation' has very rightly pointed out that "pollution and environmental degradation do not affect all segments of population in the same way". It has also pointed out the specially distressed situation of women who are the primary resource managers in this part of the world. Mention has rightly been made about the rapidly lost forest cover in the Asian region and the problem as a result.

A major limitation of the book is its inability to track the role of agri-business in the countryside. That the so-called 'green revolution' has torn asunder the last vestiges of peoples' power, has not been understood. After Independence there has not been a single phenomenon which has caused such a near total loss of farmers' self-determination, self-

EXCERPT

The term, victims of development, almost always signifies actively struggling people. The victim's will to resistance is formed in everyday struggle for survival

reliance and autonomy. The amount of environmental damage that has taken place in the rural area is no less, if not more, than what has happened to the cities where we have every kind of agenda, strategy and finance.

I shall cite an effort where much more pragmatic and incisive enquiry is flawlessly recorded. In West Africa, a remarkable study was carried out to describe the impact of development initiatives on Sahel. This was by Richard Franke and Barbara Chasin, presenting an excellent account of ecological destruction and the development dilemma in the book *Seeds of Famine*. Very rarely can a reader find such a penetrating revelation relating to the massive efforts to 'develop' this region and come to know about the anarchy and plunder of the resources. This book meticulously examined the designs of agri-business interest and how such agri-business giants take sides with those who have purchasing power, i.e. the rich minority and leave the rest, the millions of poor farmers, in the lurch.

On the positive side, those who will read this book can rid themselves of the many beautiful ideas about what happens in the name of 'development', who are its beneficiaries and victims. This review will remain incomplete if the remarkable amount of rigour that has gone into writing the book is not specially mentioned. •

Dhrubajyoti Ghosh

Dhrubajyoti Ghosh is an engineer-ecologist. He received the United Nations Global 500 Role of Honour for his contribution to welfare ecology

SHORT TAKES

Just like us



If you are a VJ, dancer, anchor, model and a fairly successful actress, all rolled into one, then your life can be a treasure of experiences which you can draw inspiration from. Tara Deshpande's first book is a case in point.

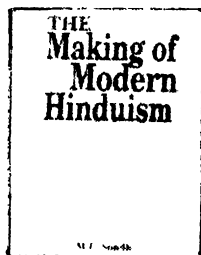
It is an interesting compilation of stories and verse. The ideas are familiar. The story of an aggressive, lonely woman who a bunch of kids plan to take revenge

on over the loss of a cricket ball, but end up striking a friendship with, is fraught with nostalgia.

The best part of the book is that it is very identifiable. The pranks described in the book are things which you and I may have indulged in at some point of time in our lives.

50 and done — stories and verse by Tara Deshpande. Published by HarperCollins. Price: Rs 275

Hinduism: the changing face

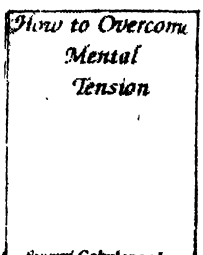


Unfortunately, the moment one mentions anything to do with Hinduism, the lid is blown off, exposing a cauldron of controversies. But there is more to Hinduism than sheer narrow politics and communalism. That Hinduism has a strong and ancient base is something which is not disputed even by its worst critics.

The book under review studies the history of the one of the oldest religions in the world. It is a collection of articles by those who have knowledge of the religion and its philosophy. The 'human face' of Hinduism, the one which has got defiled thanks to communalistic interpretations, has been analysed.

The Making of Modern Hinduism edited by M.L. Soodhi and Madhuri Santanam Soodhi. Published by Har-Anand. Price: Rs 250

Calm of mind



If you are a big-city person, you are bound to suffer from tensions. Chances are that the more successful you are, the more you are in the throes of mental agony.

This book offers a cure without sounding overly educative. And the remedy offered should work, coming as it does from a person who knows his subject well. Replete with personal experiences

and anecdotes, the book holds the interest of the reader.

Maybe it is a good idea to keep the book by your side — and go through it if you have had a bad day in office or even at home.

How to Overcome Mental Tension by Swami Gokulananda. Published by Ramakrishna Mission. Price: Rs 30

How Tavleen Singh and her team of investigative journalists plan to pull off a coup during the coming elections



Ms Tavleen Singh is god's gift to Indian journalism. She writes and the nation reads. Known for her 'passion and objectivity', particularly

towards Sonia Gandhi, Ms Singh feels that the coverage of the Jessica Lal killing in the capital, in the Indian media, was a 'shame'. How dare the media suggest that being a socialite and serving liquor in the face of outdated laws was worse than murder? Shouldn't the laws of the nation be changed immediately so that more and more women would become socialites and start joints to serve liquor? I hope the 'caretaker' government takes note of this passionate plea from our leading journalist.

Though she is worried about socialists, Ms Singh is still a formidable investigative reporter, a sort of Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward rolled into one. In one of her columns, Ms Singh mentioned "my investigations revealed that it took the police 45 minutes to arrive at Tamarind Court" though most papers reported that the police reached the scene of crime in seven minutes. But then who can question Ms Singh?

With India's most important general elections only months away, Ms Singh has formed a formidable Tavleen Singh News Service (TSNS) to cover the polls. *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *LA Times*, *Sunday Times*, *Le Monde*, *Time*, and the BBC, CNN and other famous agencies will carry the TSNS poll news. Let us peep into the posh, airconditioned office of TSNS and find out how Ms Singh is planning her forthcoming coups.

We are now inside the TSNS office where Ms Singh is holding court with some of her staffers. These include Surya Prakash (formerly of *The Pio-*

Sweating it out



Sonia Gandhi: on a sticky wicket

neer), Uma Bharti, Shobha De and Virendra Kapoor (of *Free Press Journal*?):

Tavleen: This is our first strategy session. Shobha, congratulations. You are really the ultimate in investigative journalism. None of us are as observant as you are.

De: Oh, thank you. I always do my best.

Tavleen: Which other journalist had noticed and commented upon the spreading sweat stains under Sonia's armpits? That was pretty sensational. You should have mentioned that the stains resembled Italy. In our poll coverage, you will be observing the armpits of other Congress female leaders. Do you think you can handle this onerous responsibility?

De: For the sake of TSNS, I will. I know I was a trail-blazer. Everyone was commenting on clichés, 'Rome and Ram', 'pasta', 'Mama Mia' and so on. The focus on armpits was quite different. Surya: I think in the days to come you will have so many opportunities. People still sweat in October. I am told the October heat in Mumbai is quite unbearable.

Tavleen: Surya, you are not bad either. Your 'Know Your Sonia' series in *The Pioneer* took my breath away. First, you argued that Sonia could not be a Prime Minister of this country. And you dug up so many facts on this non-citizen. I know *The Pioneer* never pays its columnists, but they appear to have spent a fortune on this crusade. I am sure you will do equally good work with TSNS. If you can go back in time, history will prove that Sonia's ancestors were related to the Borgias or some of those undesirable Popes ... oh, it will be so good. You can spend as much time as you want in Italy. Funds are no problem. Surya: Oh, for this kind of research, funds are never a problem. But for stupid stories on malnutrition, industrial pollution and so on, we are always short of funds. And of course, for paying columnists. It is not necessary I go to Italy. I can think of 100 facts about Sonia, sitting in this office.

Tavleen: That will be wonderful. Now, Uma, you are going to be an asset to us and I do hope you will not go back on your word. That is why I roped you in.

Uma Bharti: What do you mean?

Tavleen: I was impressed with your dedication. Didn't you make an

announcement that in case Sonia became the Prime Minister, you will commit self-immolation. We will do our best to stop that calamity from happening, but we can't rely on these stupid masses. If only the voters consisted of socialists like Shobha, Sonia has no chance. Anyway, if Sonia became the PM, I am relying on you. Uma: For what?

Tavleen: For self-immolation. It should be done in front of this office and we will get international publicity. The act will show our commitment to our cause. Shobha De will do one final write-up on

dedication. Whenever Sonia campaigns in Madhya Pradesh, I shall make life hell for her. Oh, she will wish she were back in Italy.

Virendra: That's the stuff, my girl. Okay, Tavleen, what is my job? I am a versatile hatchet man.

Tavleen: Working for us, you will be writing for the world's most important papers and I am sure you can raise your English to that level. I don't have to tell you how to run an anti-Sonia campaign. It would be like teaching a weasel to suck eggs.

Virendra: I boil my eggs, though the



Known for her 'passion and objectivity' particularly towards Sonia Gandhi, Tavleen Singh feels that the coverage of the Jessica Lal killing in the capital was a 'shame'

you. And I am sure your armpits will be sufficiently wet at that crucial moment.

Uma: Oh, I clarified this issue. I was misquoted.

Surya: Does that mean you will not set fire to yourself?

Uma: Why should I? Murli Manohar Joshi will crow with pleasure if I did that. I am now a political *sanyasi*. But in case the Congress came to power and Sonia became the Prime Minister, I will become a full-fledged *sanyasi*. And I am sure Govindacharya will also become one.

Tavleen: This is so disappointing. I had such high hopes. But will you work for us, at least till the polls?

Uma: Of course, I will. And with

Sangh Parivar does not like eggs. What are weasels?

De: Ask Arun Shourie, the great intellectual.

Tavleen: Let us stop here. I am flying to Italy tomorrow to get some dope on the Italian doll. By the way, we should highlight what a security risk she is. Surya, you can go down in history and find out if Italy ever threatened India, even during the days of the *Puranas*. Virendra will also help you with this kind of research which will be provided by the Sangh Parivar archives.

De: I feel so happy. My family will be thrilled at my being appointed the official armpit watcher for the Indian polls. •



After beating England at Edgbaston: India hits the Super Six

Summer of '99

Among the millions of Indians living on the edge that Sunday afternoon (30 May) were the head honchos at the country's high commission in London. India House was all set to host Team India (players, administrators, aficionados) on 31 May. The objective: to cheer on "the champions". So, an ignominious early exit from the World Cup would, to put it mildly, jeopardise the Monday meet.

But the class of '99 did not let the country down. At Edgbaston, the bowlers turned the tables on England, sent the hosts crashing out of the cup, and enabled India to squeeze into the next round.

So the reception at India House turned out to be a happy homecoming of sorts for the team — a typically Indian affair, glitches galore (the welcome songs that gave you every reason to beat a hasty retreat, BCCI president Raj

*Agony, ecstasy, drama
and disappointment.
The first phase of the
World Cup had it all*

Singh Dungarpur's reference to the longest-serving chief minister of an Indian state as "Shri Jyoti Vajpayee"), yet full of warmth (the manner in which all members of the squad, from Sachin to Srinath, obliged every tiny tot's wish to be clicked with them, the good-luck handshakes, the "shabaash" backslaps, etc.).

"I'm quite happy with the way I'm stroking the ball and I'm enjoying my bowling. But I'm happiest for the fact that I have been able to contribute to crucial victories in must-win matches for

us," said Sourav Ganguly, along with Sachin, the most-wanted man at the reception. Rahul Dravid, with two World Cup centuries under his belt and the weight of at least a hundred hysterical "he's so handsome" whispers on his shoulders, felt that "we have hit our stride, so all we have to do is keep the momentum going".

Skipper Azharuddin was grateful "to the boys for fighting back after being two down" and clear that "we are going into Super Six with a positive attitude, knowing that we have to win all three matches". The senior members of the think-tank, Messrs Gaekwad and Patel, sharing this sense of optimism, warned the "toughest stretch lies ahead, as we enter the Super Six without a point in our kitty".

Lord Jeffrey Archer, for one, is hopeful that India can pull it off. "Make no mistake, you are the best batting side in

the World Cup. In Sachin, Sourav and Rahul you have the three best batsmen in the world. You have a line-up that is quite capable of batting other teams out of matches, with the bowling providing adequate support."

Will India's World Cup campaign unfold in the manner scripted by the master storyteller?

With the sun just starting to shine bright, the top order getting its timing right and the bowling improving with every outing, will the English summer of '99 prove to be an Indian one? Ask Dungarpur and he will insist that on 20 June, "history will repeat itself" at Lord's. "These boys have what it takes to win the cup and bring glory to the nation," declares Dungarpur.

But 20 June is far away and the road to Lord's is a long one. For the moment, let's cast an eye over the World Cup that has been. Some super strokes, unplayable deliveries, classic catches, inspirational leaders. Some pathetic batting collapses, wayward bowling, sloppy fielding, unimaginative captaincy. Agony, ecstasy, drama and disappointment — the first phase of World Cup '99 had it all.

On the last day of May, the Super Six had taken up positions for the next stage of the carnival. Out of the six who lost out, three were never in the running, two were somewhat cruelly nudged out, while the defending champs were forced off their high horse.

Group A: The battle for the last two qualifying slots really went down to the wire. With South Africa playing to potential, England, India and Zimbabwe had to fight for the two remaining slots.

Till the last day, when England took on India and South Africa met Zimbabwe, the hosts "had one foot" in the Super Six. But in an extraordinary turn of events, Cronje and his men crumbled to the spirited Zimbabweans, catapulting the hopefuls into the Super Six.

Amidst whispers of "match-fixing," the rain-interrupted England-India tie was suddenly transformed into a 'winner takes it all' contest. And by the time Srinath bowled Mullally, some 28 hours after the two teams had taken the field, the hosts had been knocked out, while the Indians (led by a surprisingly animated Azharuddin) had marched into the second round.

Zimbabwe (A-3) entered the Super Six with a remarkable four-point cushion, South Africa (A-1) two, and

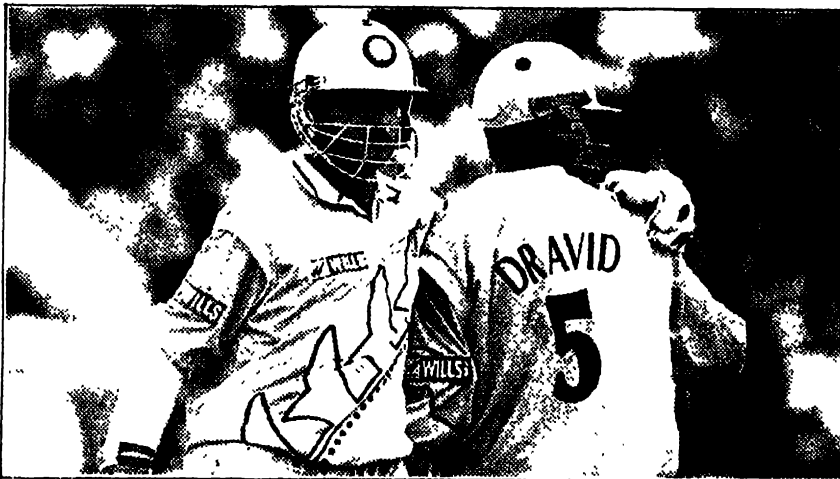
India (A-2) none.

For India, this rounded off a remarkable comeback in the "group of death" after losing the first two matches. The turning point being Tendulkar's ton against Kenya that restored the team's self-belief and kick-started the batting machine.

"With the top order coming good in style, Srinath, Mohanty and Kumble bowling well, India continues to be my dark horse," remarks Ian Botham. For England, this was a crushing blow. Not only to Alec Stewart's team but to the

20 years. "It is a devastating blow," confessed David Graveney, the chairman of English selectors.

Talking points: The solid all-round strength of South Africa epitomised by Lance Klusener's exploits (with three MoM awards), Jonty Rhodes fielding, the team's shock defeat to Zimbabwe; Zimbabwe's "coming of age" under Dave Houghton and Henry Olonga's last over against India that set it all up, the host's early exit, the disastrous performance of Sri Lanka, the defending



Sourav Ganguly and Rahul Dravid: smashing Sri Lanka out

"I'm quite happy with the way I'm stroking the ball and I'm enjoying my bowling. But I'm happiest for the fact that I have been able to contribute to crucial victories in must-win matches," said Sourav Ganguly

future of English cricket. "When it came to the crunch, England failed to produce the goods. That is when the absence of some really world-class performers was felt," observed Imran Khan.

Manchester United's unique treble in English-Euro soccer (hailed by everyone starting from Prime Minister Tony Blair and triggering celebrations that just refuse to end) and the cricket team's embarrassing exit have highlighted the fact that football in England has everything that cricket lacks in the country today.

Star players who are national heroes, popular support, media hype, commercial backing... That is why the game desperately needed a good showing from its team in a competition which might not return to the English shores for another

champs, who practically did nothing right throughout the tournament; and India's batting prowess — Sachin's strokes versus Kenya (highlight: the reverse sweep), Sourav's silken touch (and "golden arm") Rahul's run feast.

Group B: The last two days, when two berths were decided, provided high-quality, high-voltage stuff.

With Glenn McGrath finally coming into his own, Australia bundled out West Indies, but then crawled to their target to make it tough for New Zealand to qualify (the Kiwis had beaten the Aussies and would thus go into the next round with two points, while the Windies would have gone on with none). But Fleming's fleet rose to the challenge and beat Scotland at the right rate to end

False strokes

The ICC must blame itself for some of the goof-ups

Mian Riaz Samee chose to stay away from Indian high commissioner Lalit Man Singh's reception to the Indian cricket team on 31 May. It did not matter that Singh had honoured the invitation to his counterpart's bash for the Pakistani team, because Kargil had come in the way.

Kargil may yet be the reason for a flare-up at Old Trafford when India and Pakistan meet for the first time in the World Cup. Although the Indian and Pak communities in England have not known to be overtly antagonistic towards each other, the presence of thousands of supporters from their homeland might trigger a situation that could lead to trouble.

According to the British media, the threat to peace is real. But anticipatory measures like the banning of alcohol will not be enough because frenzy does not need the fuel of fizz. Misplaced nationalism will have to be tackled as much outside the ground as on it.

The tournament may ultimately turn out to be the most controversial ever. Bad decisions and the stretching of rules, combined with the ridiculous official response to pitch invasions could force a rethink on the very conduct of the championship of this size.

In the India-England match, Pakistani umpire Javed Akhtar came in for flak when he ruled England's Graham Thorpe LBW. The press, particularly *The Independent*, called him "the most incompetent umpire in this World Cup". Another, worse decision was to continue play in the drizzle and bad light that cost Nasser Hussain his wicket. The irony was that play was called off shortly after his dismissal.

On England's exit South African coach Bob Woolmer said: "What happens to England is not our concern." But despite dark insinuations, no one could prove that Proteas had gifted the match to their "brethren".

The same term was used by Akram when Pakistan lost to Bangladesh in the biggest surprise of the World Cup. But how does one

prove that the world's most lethal pace attack was impotent against the tournament's weakest batsmen, or the master blasters of Pakistan were mesmerised by Bangladeshi bowlers?

Actually rules were bent by every team. New Zealand had beaten Australia so they could carry two points to the next round should the latter also qualify. Australia went on to snuff out the spirit of the game when they faced the West Indies. Having lost to Pakistan, their only hope of taking two points into the second

Brian Lara's run in the competition.

And Bangladesh shocked everyone, including themselves, by beating Pakistan in an inconsequential tie. Another "got-up" case? One probably will never know. What one does know is that Bangladesh is going bonkers over its victories versus Scotland and Pakistan and this could well spark a cricketing revolution in the country.

At the end of the day, Pakistan (B-1) carried forward four points into the Super Six, New Zealand (B-3) two and Australia (B-2) none.

Talking points: Pakistan's power-packed performance, Akram's leadership, Shoaib's pace, Saqlain's guile, Inzamam's strokeplay and running between the wickets (or the lack of it), mutterings of ball-tampering and match-fixing, Australia's under-par showing,



round rested on West Indies' qualification.

While New Zealand played well enough to win their last match, racing past the Windies' average, that a one-day match could be reduced to a farce was proved by Australia.

Add to this South Africa's bid to introduce telecom training through earphones and you get a picture of the state of disarray. Woolmer's instructions to Hansie Cronje and Allan Donald had to be stopped after the umpire's call to the match adjudicator, but the Springboks claimed they had not flouted any rules.

A lot of thinking will have to precede amendments to rules. But this will have to wait till the World Cup is over. •

Arjit San/Galveston

Pakistan versus Bangladesh: biggest upset in the World Cup

Steve Waugh's unimaginative captaincy, the McGrath ball that breached Lara's defence, Twose's toughness, Cairns' charisma, Allott's away swinger, the Caribbean collapse, Lara's failure, the said exit of the Ambrose-Walsh duo from the World Cup arena, Bangladesh's brave debut.

Now, it's all set for Super Six. Here's hoping for lots of sunshine, small grounds packed to capacity (mainly by supporters from the subcontinent), some top-class performances, great cricketing moments, and a Fab Four line-up of Pakistan, South Africa, Australia/New Zealand and India, from pure cricketing aesthetics. •

Sumit Das Gupta/London



POLL PORTENTS: file picture of the recent municipal elections in West Bengal

WEST BENGAL

Slipping up

An alliance of TMC, BJP and Congress defeat the Left Front in the municipal election

Are the people in the districts of West Bengal fed up with their Left rulers? Results of a few municipal elections in the state seem to reveal such a trend. Elections were recently held in 14 municipalities in West Bengal, at many of which the ruling Left Front (LF) had to fight against a united Opposition. As results poured in, the writing on the wall was pretty clear for the CPI(M)-led front in the state. It was defeated in eight of the 14 municipalities.

The LF retained Uluberia, Rajarhat-Gopalpur, Gangarampur, Krishnagar, Sonarpur and Siliguri municipalities. But it lost Islampur, Egra and Madhyamgram. The Congress retained Sainthia and Kaliaganj. The GNLFF maintained its grip over Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong.

There was a tie at Mal, a stronghold of the CPI(M). But Mamata Banerjee's Trinamul Congress (TMC) registered a major victory, snatching away several seats from the CPI(M) which previously controlled this municipality. The board was constituted finally by the BJP-TMC-Congress alliance — locally known as Ram Front — as against the ruling *Bam* (Left) Front. "The results indicate that the CPI(M)'s strong

base in the districts is getting eroded," said a Congress worker. The hypothesis is going to be tested at Asansol, Kult, Dum Dum, South Dum Dum and Maheshtala municipalities who will vote soon.

The alliance between the TMC and the Congress was largely responsible for the rout of the LF in Egra, where the TMC and the Congress bagged five and four wards respectively. At Islampur, out of the 14 seats, the Left bagged five. The Congress took six while BJP won two seats and the TMC got one. The TMC scored the maximum at the Madhyamgram municipality — which is a north-east Calcutta suburb — snatching ten out of 23 seats. The CPI(M) got nine, the Congress two, the BJP and the Forward Bloc one each. The LF won 18 of Uluberia's 28 seats, while the BJP-TMC-Congress got ten. In Rajarhat-Gopalpur municipality, the LF won 16 out of the 27 seats while the TMC bagged seven and the Congress took three only.

The outcome was enough cause for concern. At CPI(M)'s two-day state committee meeting held recently, party bigwigs sat down to discuss the issue. If it was complacency which made the CPI(M) take a beating, for the TMC-BJP combine

and the Congress, it was the rejuvenated grass-roots workers which made the difference.

Despite the TMC-BJP combine's limited influence in the urban and semi-urban areas, these results have compelled the LF into deep introspection. "The results show that the people want to root out the CPI(M), which cannot silence them even with its muscle power," TMC leader Mamata Banerjee said. Despite the state Congress leadership's position on the matter, Congressmen at a number of municipalities preferred an alliance with the TMC-BJP combine and got dividend eventually.

Observers say that the TMC-BJP combine's increasing influence at the district level will pose a problem for the Left Front during the coming Lok Sabha elections. On the other hand, the PCC and the TMC leadership did not object to their local units forming municipal bodies together. The TMC openly declared that it would be ready to take support from the Congress in forming boards just to keep the LF out of power. "The municipal results will certainly give us impetus to do better in the ensuing Lok Sabha polls," Ranjit Panja, TMC MP, told SUNDAY.

The diminishing influence of the LF came to the surface last year when the Congress, led by a maverick Adhir Chowdhury, swept all the 23 wards in Behrampore. The outcome this time, however, became possible after the consolidation of the anti-Left vote brought about by unprecedented alliances among the TMC, the BJP and the Congress. In most places, these were loose, unofficial arrangements which delivered the desired result.

The question, now, is whether the Opposition in West Bengal — the TMC-BJP-Congress alliance — will be in a position to maintain its unity in the parliamentary elections. It is unlikely that the Congress and the BJP will continue with the alliance. And their failure to remain united during the period between the municipal and the Lok Sabha elections will prove beneficial for the ruling front, the LF leaders asserted at their recent meeting.

However, some TMC and Congress leaders expressed the hope that the LF's stronghold at the district level will be weakened further, referring to a recent document published by the Forward Bloc, an LF partner. The FB raises a few questions while refuting the charges levelled by a veteran CPI(M) leader against the party. "The policy of identifying communalism as the main danger and compromise with parties representing the capitalists is utterly wrong. In fact, such a line will only ruin the Left movement and lead it astray," the document points out. It is an opportunistic line, the document observes.

One of the indicators of the municipal results, observers say, is that they reveal the public disillusionment with the functioning of the earlier boards. BJP leaders claim that poor civic amenities and corruption institutionalised through party structures threw the LF out of power in some of the municipal bodies and this will also help them dislodge the LF from the Writers' Buildings in the near future.

Others, however, say that though local issues play a major role in the local polls, it is different with the Assembly and Lok Sabha elections. And CPI(M) leaders do not reckon that the arrangement among the BJP, the TMC and the Congress at the level of any parliamentary constituency will be easy. "We have to keep in mind that it is the Congress which pulled down the BJP government at the Centre," they point out. •

Ashis Bose/Calcutta

BIHAR

The arms and a man

The CBI fails to arrest a key accused in the Purulia arms drop case

Even as the Ananda Marg denies it had anything to do with the arms drop over Purulia in 1995, the central Intelligence Bureau (IB) claims it has made a breakthrough in establishing the organisation's involvement in the matter.

According to the IB, the cache of arms were dropped in that particular area so that they could be sneaked away under the custody of the Ananda Marg. Ever since the drop took place, the organisation has been under suspicion because the drop zone was predominantly under its influence.

Speaking to SUNDAY, IB sources divulged that one of the key accused, Satyanarayan Gauda, alias Randy, also had a third name — Suryanand Avadhut. Sources point out that the Avadhut surname was common among the members of the Ananda Marg organisation. During investigation, it was found that Randy was well-known by the name of Suryanand Avadhut among the Margis.

IB sources say that Randy remains at large despite a few close shaves with the cops. First, he escaped from Dhanbad in

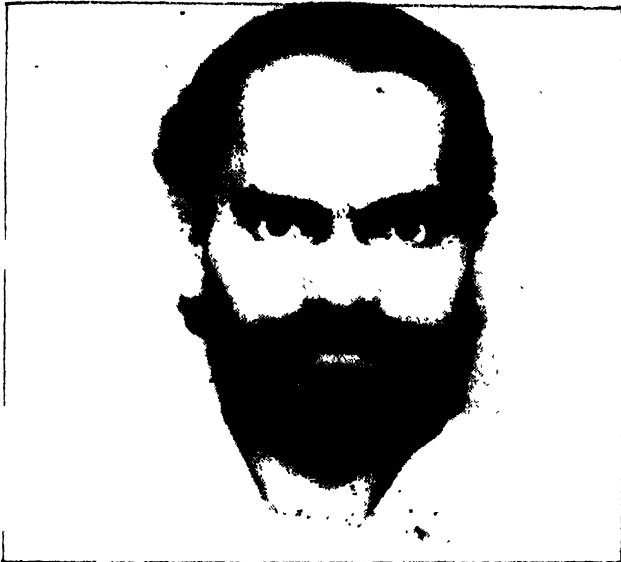
How green was the poet

An exhibition in Calcutta highlights Tagore's concern for the environment

To all of us, Rabindranath Tagore has been the poet, the novelist, the lyricist and composer, painter, a modern-day sage and even the reformist. An exhibition was recently held in Calcutta which focused on a lesser known aspect of this multi-faceted personality — Tagore, the environmentalist.

The exhibition, Rabindranath and Environment, had about 40 quotations from different works of Tagore which reveal his concern for environment. In some writings, it appears in a subtle way. In others, the poet minces no words in raising the issue. Some of these environment-related quotations are accompanied by photographs. Some are displayed with conceptual drawings.

The idea of highlighting Tagore, the environmentalist, was conceived and implemented by Arunendu Bando-padhyay, who has been working on the concept for quite some time. A chance meeting of Bando-padhyay with the West Bengal environment minister transformed the idea into reality, with the state environment department funding the project.



PLAYING CAT-AND-MOUSE: file picture of Satyanarayan Gauda

June, 1997. Then he escaped from Gaya in February 1998 and then from Howrah Station. Indian intelligence agencies had sought Interpol assistance to nab Randy. Suspected hideouts were raided across the world. But no result was forthcoming.

Sources confirm that a large part of the Purulia arms has ended up with militant outfits like the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) who are active in Dhanbad and Gaya areas. They

The Rs 75,000-project not only has the exhibition but also a book on the subject by Bandopadhyay which is due for release on the forthcoming environment day. Speaking to SUNDAY, Bandopadhyay said that the exhibition was given shape in three months with the active support from the state environment minister and officials of the environment department, including Kalyan Bagchi, the environment secretary. He also pointed out that the display panels were made in a way so that they could be easily transported. The environment department wanted the exhibition to be mobile.

Coming back to Tagore, Bandopadhyay pointed out

A NEW VIEW: the Tagore exhibition



believe that these sophisticated arms were supposed to have been provided to the militants by none other than Randy himself in lieu of shelter granted to him by the MCC.

Moreover, the CBI — investigating the arms drop case — is saddled with the problem of rift in the ranks. A well-placed CBI official in Ranchi told SUNDAY that there was no coordination among CBI's West Bengal unit and its branches in Bihar. The official felt that the foremost duty of any investigating agency involved in the case should have been to locate the missing arms and ensure their recovery. He revealed that outlaws in the interiors of South Bihar were now brandishing sophisticated arms reportedly acquired from Randy.

The CBI official also felt that had there been sincere action by investigating agencies, the tribal villages of the region would not have become a criminal's den. He pointed out that CBI units in West Bengal and Bihar never exchanged information on the whereabouts of Randy. In fact, Randy remained in hiding in Bihar for a long time, simply by moving from one place to another. Again, it was lack of coordination within the CBI which made it possible for him to escape at Howrah Station.

Two years back, the Ranchi police had made a major breakthrough about the missing Purulia arms when they arrested Surendra Bengali, a notorious criminal of the area. At that time, the police had disclosed that Bengali had links with Randy and his arrest was to give them vital leads about the arms deals in the area. Although Bengali is still languishing in Ranchi Jail, the police has failed to 'break' him in connection with the arms drop case. •

D.P. Sharan/Ranchi

that the poet's experiences during his *Paschim Yatra* in the 1880s perhaps led to the blossoming of the environmentalist within him. He was particularly disturbed by the ugly face of civilization's arrogance over nature, its attendant pollution and consumerism.

Tagore had expressed his anguish in literary works which followed — *Prakritir Pratisadh* (Nature's Revenge) or *Manashi* (The Beloved). Over the years, his concerns became more focused and he became increasingly forthright in discussing issues which are dominating the environment movement at present.

Tagore was also critical of the city's hegemony over the rural world and wastage of manpower. Interestingly, more than seven decades ago, before anyone could think about pollution in the Ganges, Tagore wrote in 1922: "Some years ago, when I set out from Calcutta on my voyage to Japan (in 1916), the first thing that shocked me...was the ruthless intrusion of the factories for making gunny bags on both banks of the Ganges."

Even in his lectures delivered in Santiniketan, Tagore had expressed his concern for environment. In 1932, he even parted with one of his novels to generate funds for constructing Shyamali and Punascha, two ecofriendly houses in Santiniketan. Bandopadhyay, an architect by profession, is also working on a project on Rabindranath's concept of environment housing.

Though the state government has stood behind Bandopadhyay, it remains to be seen how serious it will be in taking Tagore's ideas to their logical conclusion. •

Jayanta Basu/Calcutta

Agony and ecstasy

Malaika Arora, and MTV, offer a shoulder to cry on

Hello. Err, hello. Yeah, who's this? Sherry. Sherry, hi, this is Malaika; what's up? Well, like there's this guy, and I really like him a lot. Really? Yeah, really. He was like, talking to me and all, and we were real friendly, but suddenly he's changed. Like how, Sherry? Well, he isn't talking to me anymore, and he doesn't call and boo hoo hoo...

Young girls (and boys) have never had it so good. Malaika Arora, best known for her *Chaiya chaiya* act with Shah Rukh *bhai*, is now displaying her never-ending legs to great advantage on a couch while fielding calls from the love-lorn with the intention of dishing out sensible advice.

So Sherry is told that if her reluctant swain really, really loves her, he will start talking to her again. And if he doesn't, well, he doesn't deserve a sensitive girl like Sherry. And that there are plenty of boys from where that one came from, and surely she, Sherry, will soon find someone



LENDING AN EAR: Malaika Arora

who will never abandon her, and that she, Sherry, will be happy for evermore, take it from Malaika aunty.

With *Loveline*, MTV has permanently redefined agony aunts. Television's always had such aunties (and uncles) but never ones with such perfectly-proportioned limbs (Priya Tendulkar's attempt at so doing on a short-lived Zee India programme was defined by her saris and her soft-pedalled responses). Malaika is much more likely to talk about condoms and safe sex than discreet, soft-focus romantic encounters.

This is the millennium approach to love: where if the person you are attracted to has no time for you, you dump him, honey, because time is money. And Malaika personifies this have-time-will-romance Generation X where the answers don't matter as much as having your questions aired on MTV. •

TRIPURA

A different flavour

With bushes ravaged by fungal infection, the orange growers of Jampui hills are about to take up coffee plantation

The picturesque land of the Mizos in north Tripura's Jampui hills may soon go in for a change of face. Jampui is famous for its juicy oranges. But all that is going to change because nearly 7,000 growers are planning to give up their oranges and grow coffee instead.

This is because the region's orange basket, located along the Mizoram-Tripura border, is facing attacks of a fungal infection which is leading to a largescale destruction of the orange bush cover. And Mizo cultivators can no longer absorb the mounting losses.

"We have witnessed a disease known as the powdery mildew which is a kind of fungal disease. In some cases, the stem of the bush is attacked by big insects," says Laldingliana, who is an orange grower.

R.K. Lyina, general secretary of Mizo Convention and a prominent social worker from the Jampui hill areas, recently told a group of visiting newsmen at Bhangmoon village that earlier the farmers had no alternative; but now switching over to coffee plantation was a way out of the mess.

But officials at the horticulture department of the state government are more keen to shift the responsibility of switching over to coffee on planters. "They are not serious at all and do not take due care of the trees to protect them from disease and pests as per the specification of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)," points out S. Bhattacharya, managing director of Horticulture Corporation.

"The trunks need to be cleaned with lime water and sprayed with insecticides. Moreover, in case of a fungal attack, the plants should be immediately uprooted and removed. But these directions were not followed by the planters," Bhattacharya said. To drive home the point that planters were not taking care of their orchards, he said that the yield in state government-owned orchards had not gone down as proper care was being taken there as per the specification of the ICAR.

An orchard with seven to eight trees used to yield oranges worth Rs 2,00,000 per year. According to Lyina, with the dip in this year's production, the income is likely to come down to Rs 30,000 to Rs 40,000.

Confirming the downward trend in the yield, the block development officer (BDO) of Jampui hills, M.K. Debbarma, said that with prices of pesticides and other medicines going up, the planters were finding it difficult to invest in a big way to protect the plants. The water crisis in the hill areas has added to the woes.

Debbarma said that more than 50,000 saplings of coffee were distributed among the planters in 1997-98. More than one lakh saplings are likely to be distributed in the coming year.

The state tourism department organises orange festival every year to bring in tourists in the hills. Will they now come to see coffee plantation instead? •

Kuntala Chakraborty/Jampui hills



SUNDAY WEEK

KUSUM BHANDARI

BEGINNING 6 JUNE, 1999

ARIES

(21 March-20 April)

You will derive great zest for life in knowing that you have worthwhile goals to pursue. You will be determined to succeed. Try contacting associates in distant places. It seems that some valuable news is waiting to be passed on. Influential people will be more open to your proposals.

TAURUS

(21 April-20 May)

A steady mind and a dedicated approach to work is required. You may be a little too complacent and are likely to take things lightly. Remember that things that come easy go that way too. It is up to you to put in your best. Attend to health matters. Romance could distract you from your immediate goals.

GEMINI

(21 May-20 June)

Be quietly confident. Expect irritations to try your patience. The young may be a particular worry. A trip can be cancelled. Confinement does not agree with you in some ways, yet you have the time to get ready for a public appearance. Stop worrying about things that will never happen.

CANCER

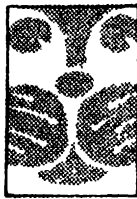
(21 June-20 July)

It seems that you really do not have your heart in what you are doing. You will have to commit yourself to a far greater extent if your actions are going to add up to anything. The time has probably come to step back and reassess your priorities.

LEO

(21 July-20 August)

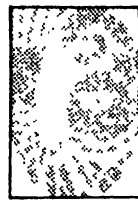
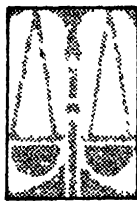
The week gets off to a lively start. Keep run-of-the-mill business activities on the boil. There is scope for making them more profitable. Hidden forces are working in your favour and will raise your standing in the eyes of people who matter. You may find new opportunities for your career.



LIBRA

(21 September-20 October)

Romantic alliances can begin in unlikely circumstances. Occupational activities can bring you into contact with someone you find attractive or compatible. Do not stick rigidly to your guns where occupational problems are concerned. A more flexible approach will save you a lot of trouble.



SAGITTARIUS

(21 November-20 December)

This is not a time to be complacent. The best-laid plans can go off-course with no warning. You could find yourself short of ready cash when in company. This will make you feel like a bit of a fool and there seems little hope of borrowing in time. Friends may be demanding.

CAPRICORN

(21 December-20 January)

This week will be much to your liking. There will be little to disturb you. There should be peace both at work and at home. Being left more to your own pace and devices will give you the time and opportunity to do satisfying work. It's a time when you can indulge the craftsman in you.

AQUARIUS

(21 January-20 February)

It's a good week for digging and getting to the bottom of things. A merely superficial acquaintance with new subjects will add nothing to your knowledge. You should get all the support needed to spur you on from family members. But influential people may not be as responsible as you would like.

PISCES

(21 February-20 March)

You may have a tendency to read more into other people's words than is intended. It is best to check with the sources before jumping to conclusions. Allow room for events to work out in their own way. Do not mess up things by being overly interfering. •

VIRGO

(21 August-20 September)

The more open and trusting you are of others, the more relaxed they will be with you. Suspicion, on the other hand, will simply breed itself. People met for the first time may be ill at ease. All your charms may be required to settle them down.

SCORPIO

(21 October-20 November)

However pressing is the need to contact influential people, it's better to hold off for the time-being. They won't take kindly to having their personal lives interrupted. You need to act smartly to prevent people from stepping into positions in your place.

Watch the fun

Power politics is the same all around the world. Although the World Trade Organisation prides itself on being a multilateral body, offering a forum for all member nations to settle problems of world trade through negotiation, its principal negotiators can't get their act together in choosing a chief

HEARD AT DALAL STREET

India wanted to join the basket of currencies, not become a bait case.

A BROKER WHEN THE RUPEE DROPPED BY EIGHT PAISE TO THE DOLLAR AFTER THE CONFLICT IN KARGIL



Ramakrishna Hegde: deals of another kind

from among themselves.

A fight broke out nearly a year ago between the two top candidates for director-general of WTO, Mike Moore, former New Zealand Prime Minister and Supachai Panitchpakdi, Thailand's deputy prime minister.

As the director-general is appointed by consensus rather than election and the process was stalemated, negotiators decided to resolve differences through an informal election. Sixty-two countries supported Moore while 59 backed Supachai.

Now, Supachai claims that the election was unfair. He says "anonymous faxes" were sent to various member countries alleging that he had promised Holland a deputy director-generalship

in return for its support. A bribe? You could call it that.

India, where politicians are so used to allegations of this sort, is watching the fun. As its political leadership — commerce minister Ramakrishna Hegde — is busy in deals of another kind in Bangalore, it is the

bureaucracy which is deciding whom India should back.

Rough SAILing

Things are looking down for steel manufacturers rather than up, if the past year's results of SAIL are anything to go by.

The steel giant has recorded a loss of Rs 1,574 crore in 1998-99. Its assessment that it would make a loss of Rs

1,000 crore this year has proved only partially accurate.

Till December 1998, it has indeed recorded a loss of Rs 1,000 crore. But in the first three months of the new year, SAIL has notched up losses of Rs 574 crore! This leaves virtually no scope for making up.

If a steel major like SAIL is in such a bad way, consider what the fate of the others in the steel sector must be.

Another cup?

The World Cup has caused another contest — in the information ministry. As the war between the two contenders for the television marketing rights of the World Cup intensifies, charges are now being made about the corruption that is rife in Doordarshan.

It is a personal battle now



The SAIL office: poor showing

between Harish Thawani of Nimbus, the official marketing agents for the World Cup and Siddhartha Ray of Stracon, the other bidder for marketing rights. They have gone to court and filed defamation suits charging each other with 'corrupt' dealings with Doordarshan.

The man caught in the crossfire is O.P. Kejriwal, the acting chief of Prasar Bharati. All he wants to do is to go to the Nehru Memorial Museum as director, the post for which files have been processed and his name cleared. But the ministry of information doesn't seem to want to let him go. •

CHECK-LIST

Free flight: who offers the best deals

■ **Sahara Airlines:** Free hotel stays in a tie-up in certain sectors. The only problem with Sahara is that it flies only limited sectors.

■ **Indian Airlines:** All it offers you is wide-bodied planes and an all-India network.

■ **Jet Airways:** Is marketing itself as a niche airline — offers 30 per cent discount for government and public sector employees, offers free holidays as an incentive to travel Jet, and more relaxed check-in rules.

Amethi beckons

■ The Congress has begun the process of courting the people of Amethi.

First, Sonia Gandhi met a delegation of workers from the constituency. This was after she had taken back her resignation. Apparently the delegation told her that all

HEARD IN NEW DELHI

Q: If a film is ever made on the formation of the Nationalist Congress, what would it be called?

A: North-east By North-west.

A JOURNALIST AT THE PRESS CLUB



Sonia Gandhi: Just file the papers

that she had to do was to file her nomination and the party would do the rest.

Then Captain Satish Sharma invited the delegates to lunch at the Aero Club. About 400 delegates from Amethi, Sultanpur and Rae Bareilly were present. The meeting — in the nature of a pre-poll survey — went on till late in the evening. Sharma asked the delegates to return and publicise Sonia's message.

So will Sonia Gandhi contest from UP? What about Rahul and Priyanka? Although people did discuss the possibility, no decision has been taken yet.

Home alone

■ IAS officers of the 1967 and 1969 batch are down in the dumps. Their

home secretary, Kamal Pande.

This is a major problem, because the new home secretary will settle down in his ministry, figure out what is what and then look at the postings. All this will take at least four months.

So those officers who had packed their bags and were waiting to be told where to go, have now settled down again, unpacked their bags and are functioning from briefcases.

And in four months, the election process will start. So the postings will be postponed further. That's the way the government works.

Legal advice

■ The government is now in a quandary over whether to go ahead with the prosecution of for-

mer minister of external affairs, Madhavsinh Solanki, in the Bofors case.

The President of India has already given his assent to the prosecution. But now the CBI is advising the government to hold its horses: because the case against Solanki is not strong, and if it doesn't stand the scrutiny of the courts it will look very bad for the government.

Solanki was charged with carrying a letter for the Swiss authorities, advising them to go slow in the enquiry into the identity of a bank account holder (allegedly 'Q').

This enquiry would have revealed the name of the per-



Madhavsinh Solanki: can he be charged?

son who got the bribes in the Bofors gun deal. Solanki, when interrogated, said he had "forgotten" who had given him the letter.

The problem with the case is that no crime has been committed. Carrying a letter to a foreign capital is not a crime. So, under which section of the Criminal Procedure Code can Solanki be charged? And if it is a rigged-up section, surely the courts will strike it down?

The government is considering the CBI's advice seriously. •

CHECK-LIST

Who's saying what on inducting ground troops in Serbia

■ **Germany:** As chairman of the European Union, Germany has to take a cautious view. It is totally opposed to the involvement of ground troops. Yet, its army says the war cannot be won without bringing in ground troops.

■ **US:** As Nato force commander General Wesley Clark has said that at least 50,000 ground troops must be used to make the air strikes effective. However, Bill Clinton is still uncertain about taking a decision — which will remind many of the Vietnam war.

■ **Britain:** Has strongly argued for ground troops so that the air strikes are effective in curbing Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic. Reportedly, Britain has had some effect on Bill Clinton.

Fathers and sons

After he shot off his now-infamous letter to the Congress president, P.A. Sangma packed his bags and caught the next morning's flight to New York. He could not attend the CWC meeting called to discuss his letter because, he said, he had more important things to do: such as attend his son's convocation.

Other Congressmen were not so lucky.

Murli Deora's son Milind was also graduating from Boston University on 23 May. And Deora was all set to fly out to Boston and attend the convocation when the crisis broke out. He had



Sangma: paternal duties

even booked the hotel a year in advance. But events took on a momentum of their own: as a result of Sangma's letter, Sonia resigned and the party called for an AICC session on the 25th. Under those circumstances, there was no way that Deora could have made it to Boston. He had to be content with watching the event on the Internet.

Sangma, on the other hand, made it to his son's convocation. In fact, one of the first questions the media asked him on his return was

HEARD IN AICC

This is one Pilot we haven't been able to shoot down.

AN AICC MEMBER COMMENTING ON RAJESH PILOT'S SUPPORT TO THE PAWAR GROUP FROM INSIDE THE CONGRESS

not about his expulsion from the Congress, but whether he was done with his paternal duties.

The rift widens

Although the national executive meeting of the Samajwadi Party led by Mulayam Singh Yadav resolved that the Rashtriya Loktantrik Morcha would continue, obviously relations between the two Yadavs have soured badly.

The RLM didn't say a word in criticism of the CBI

for the 'high-handed' manner in which it interrogated Bihar chief minister Rabri Devi. This matter was left to Laloo Yadav to fight alone. Moreover, Laloo Yadav came to Delhi for one day and left the same day — after a meeting with Sonia Gandhi but without meeting Mulayam Singh Yadav.

The RLM wants to criticise neither Laloo Yadav nor the CPI(M). It is saying so at every opportunity. But meanwhile, the breach is getting wider. It doesn't look as if this alliance will ever take off.

CHECK-LIST

The peaceniks: those who should be encouraged to speak on Indo-Pak relations

■ **Dilip Kumar:** He got the Nishan-e-Pakistan, the highest civilian honour in the country. But he's an Indian. If the BJP government really wants to de-escalate the conflict, Kumar could be sent as the Prime Minister's unofficial envoy to Islamabad.

■ **Mohammad Azharuddin:** An Indian Muslim, the captain of the cricket team and widely respected for his sense of fair play, Azharuddin could be asked to issue an emotive plea to the young men and women of both countries, to say no to war.

■ **Girish Karnad:** Gentle, soft-spoken, a Rhodes scholar and a well-known film and drama personality, he has high credibility in Pakistan. He is known to oppose war and is intelligent enough to put a political argument across cogently.

■ **Aamir Khan:** A thinking actor and director whose commitment to India is beyond doubt and who is a heart-throb in Pakistan. He should be encouraged to make a trip to Pakistan and issue an appeal to oppose war.

Chinese balm

George Fernandes may be getting it from all sides for his "irresponsible" statements about the Pakistani Army acting independently of the government. But it has won him new friends: the Chinese!

Actually, the process started with the round table organised by the Samata Party on the Nato bombing of Serbia. Samata Party called the Chinese ambassador to the meeting, but didn't really think he would come because of Samata's known position on China — it supports the Dalai Lama's movement for free Tibet. Fernandes himself has spared no criticism of China.

But on Kosovo, especially after the bombing of the Chinese embassy, the Chinese have a strong position. So not only did the embassy



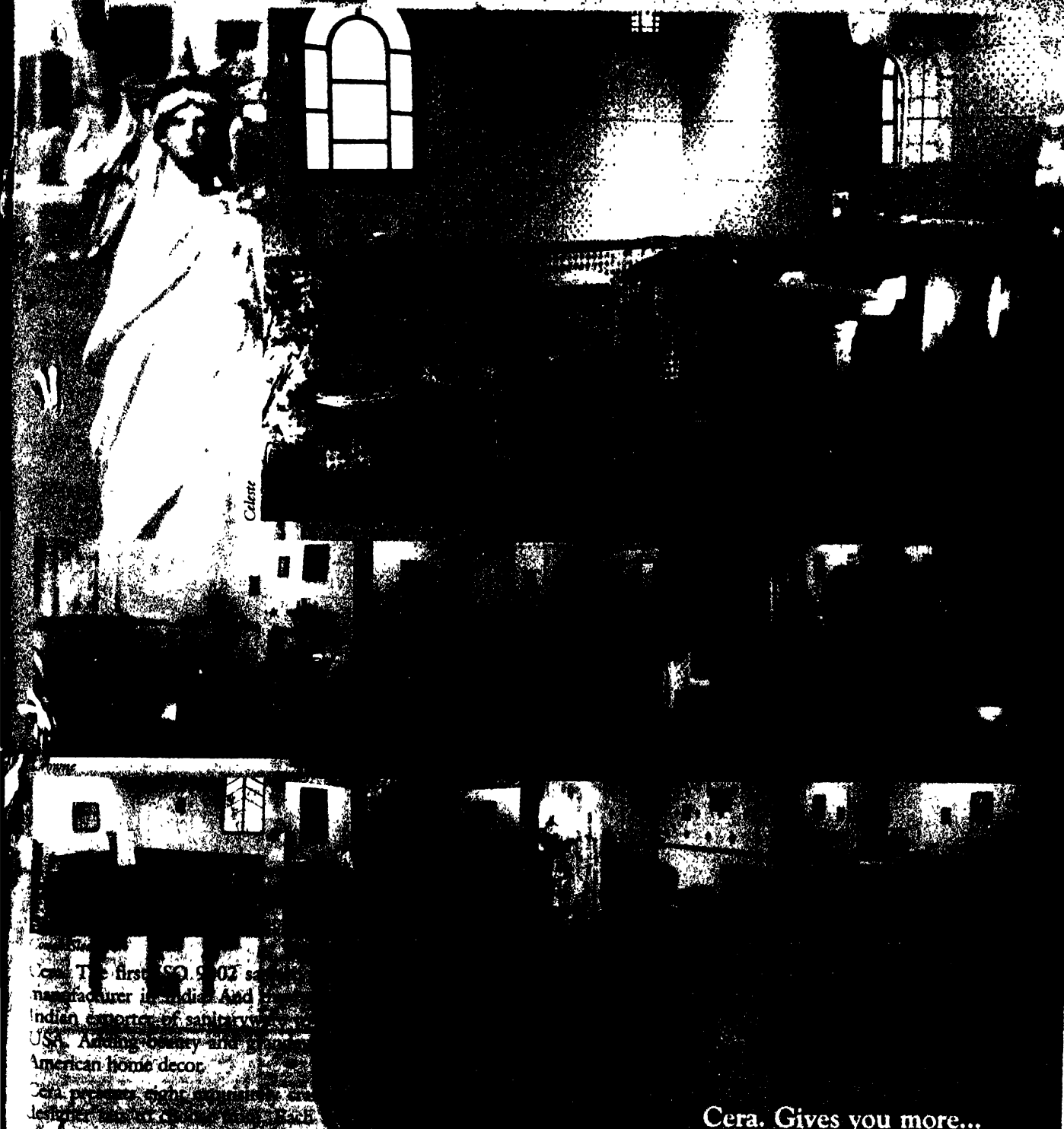
Fernandes: winning them over

send a political counsellor, but she also spoke at length about the Samata Party's efforts to bring about world peace!

And now, the Chinese have reacted approvingly to Fernandes' statement about the domestic situation in Pakistan and have conveyed to the government that they sympathise with India.

Fernandes is pleased. Both the Tibetans and the Chinese consider the Samata Party their friend! •

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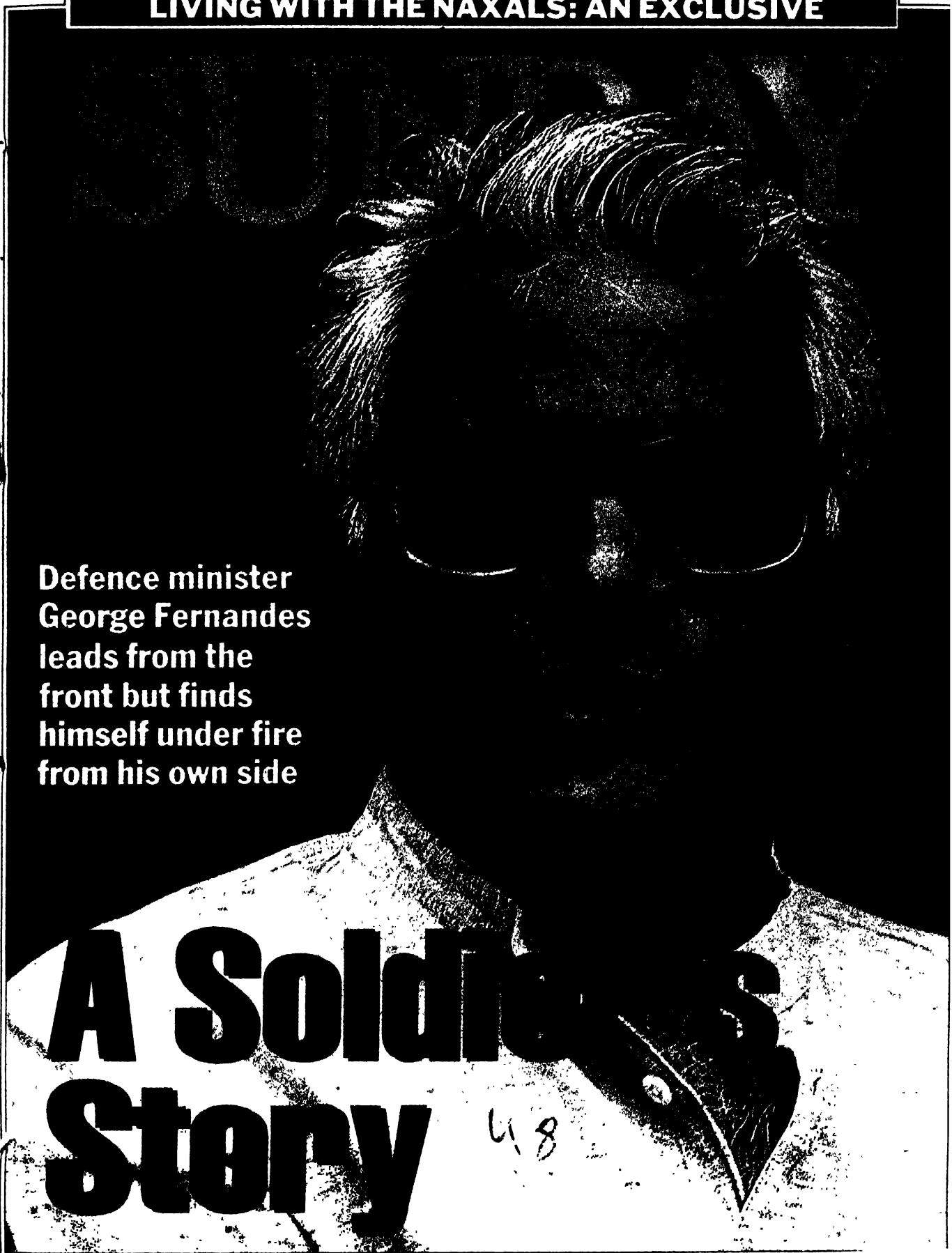


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LIVING WITH THE NAXALS: AN EXCLUSIVE



**Defence minister
George Fernandes
leads from the
front but finds
himself under fire
from his own side**

**A Soldier's
Story**



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Letters.....	4
Sight and Sound.....	6
Seen.....	7
Profile.....	26
Spotlight.....	36
Khaas Baat.....	42
News.....	59
Sunday Week.....	63
Business Diary.....	64
Random Notes.....	65
Delhi Diary.....	66



MEDIA

He's got rhythm

Click the mouse if you want an update on
Subhash Ghal's *Taan*..... 41



MANI-TALK
Mani Shankar Aiyar..... 8

POWER PLAY
Rajiv Shukla..... 21

THE SOUTH BLOCK
Inder Malhotra..... 33

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COVER STORY 12

A soldier's story

Defence minister George Fernandes leads from the front but finds himself under fire from his own side

MOVEMENT 28

Close encounter

Three days with the Naxalites in the jungles of Dandakaranya



ENVIRONMENT 38

All that gas!

Will the Supreme Court directive to introduce cars conforming to Euro norms help contain pollution in Delhi?



Revolt in the ranks

This refers to the cover story *The rebel* (30 May—5 June). Anybody who has been keeping a tab on the Congress politics knew that not everything was hunky-dory in the party. In fact, the revolt by Sharad Pawar and his two Congress colleagues, P.A. Sangma and Tariq Anwar, against the Congress high command was not surprising. For the last six months, the rumour mills were abuzz with stories about how Sharad Pawar was getting cornered by the high command and was being pushed to the brink by

Sonia Gandhi and her lieutenants. The most damaging, however, was the story that a section of the BJP leadership was goading the disgruntled elements of the Congress.

In the last few months, Sonia Gandhi, perhaps, confident after the last Assembly poll results, had increasingly surrounded herself with men who had very poor electoral credentials. None of these Congress buffoons are confident of winning a seat by their own ability. Most of them are only Rajya Sabha members and had contributed very little in increasing the Congress seats in the hustings.

But the same cannot be said about Pawar and Sangma. Both these leaders have immense popularity in their own strongholds in Maharashtra and Meghalaya. And over the years, they have also proved to be good organisers of the party. So it was natural that they felt neglected when they saw that the plum party posts being cornered by men of lesser calibre and they are being made to sit on the fences.

This time, Sonia Gandhi may have escaped the humili-

ation and had the entire party rallying after her. But things may not be same if Sonia continues to ignore men of qualities and abilities. Because the BJP may not give the Congress the second time, and could split the party from middle.

Shyamal Panda, Cuttack (Orissa)

■ Sharad Pawar has raised an important question which the Congress leadership has failed to answer: Sonia's foreign origin. It's a pity that India doesn't have any son of the soil to lead the country. The sycophancy of the Congress leaders is ridiculous as they genuflect to Sonia Gandhi who hardly has any lessons in politics.

Pawar, Sangma and Anwar have demonstrated grit and self-esteem in raising an important issue.

Virendra Kumar, Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh)

Licence to kill

The writer has raised questions pertaining to the conduct of Bina Ramani, a high-flying socialite in Delhi (*The party is over*, 16—22

May). If she has broken the law, she will pay for it.

The writer has raised a very pertinent question: "Can the guests at the party be tried for violating excise laws?" Another co-related issue is: are the customers—who after having been informed by the management and staff that the restaurant does not have a licence to serve alcohol still demand drink and insist on being served with them—as much guilty as the management? The real culprit is the easy access a certain class has to firearms.

Onkar Chopra, New Delhi

■ Model Jessica Lal's murder at the socialite Bina Ramani's restaurant has generated more heat. Over the past several decades, the new generation has been brought up as spoil child. Wallowing in luxury, they believe they can get away with everything because of money power and political connections.

Unfortunately, the misdeeds of these brats are forgotten till some other such case takes place. If the past experiences are any indication, no person is likely to be punished because of the political connections. Needless to say, all the concerned authorities are partners in this sordid game.

V. Sagar, Delhi

Soul-searching

The Indian National Congress, founded by Hume, drew into its fold giants, men and women of steel, who helped India become free (*The Rajiv legacy*, 23—29 May).

Pandit Nehru's role as the father of nepotism in India, made possible his moderately-educated daughter Indira to become Congress President and Prime Minister. The unfortunate transformation of Congress into a rump happened under her leadership.

Sharad Pawar: rebel with a cause



Within the party, democracy, dissent, elections got snuffed out. Any Congressman who was a leader in his own right, was considered a threat to her and was thrown out. Loyalty to her meant loyalty to the party. Not the other way.

To the present Congress leaders, Sonia is the only mascot to ride on. India certainly needs the Congress. If Congressmen make a serious effort and restore



Sonia Gandhi: Congress's mascot

democracy, they would truly serve its and the nation's interest. The interests of Congress and the interests of India should again merge and cease to be mutually exclusive.

N. Narasimhan, Bangalore (Karnataka)

Moment of truth

Despite his hatred for the Muslims, Sharad Pawar has received warm support from practically all states across India (*The Challenge*, 23—29 May). His work at the grass-roots level gave him personal rapport with the leaders of various groups.

Mamata Banerjee, Chandrababu Naidu, Chander Shekhar, Mulayam Singh, V.P. Singh have already welcomed his bold initiative. It's his moment of truth and triumph, if he suppresses negative strains of his own past strategies, comes out with a true national

coalition of disparate political groups, representing regional and ideological pluralities and initiates moves to rearrange power distribution equations, his image of behind-the-scenes operator with shades of a shadowy *khalnayak*, can drastically change. Pawar must exploit his chance to frame policies that will reflect true secularism and not the pseudo-secularism of the Congress.

Sharad Pawar must strive for national reconciliation, and come out with an extensive social justice programme with a special 'Muslim package'.

Ghulam Muhammed, Bombay (Maharashtra)

Laudable effort

Hats off to Father Varghese and Brinda Subramanian for their excellent work for the rehabilitation of street children in Bangalore (*End of innocence*, 23—29 May). It's not only in Bangalore but in all the major cities, street children need proper counselling, food, shelter, clothing and education. While some NGOs are doing yeoman service to ameliorate the condition of these hapless children, the government



Hansie Cronje: taking unfair advantage

must do something for their rehabilitation.

B.N. Bose, Calcutta (West Bengal)

Save cricket

This refers to the story *Save the game* (23—29 May). The writer has rightly pointed out that the gizmos and gadgets have taken over the modern-day cricket. Sadly enough, the days of white flannels have gone along with most of the little niceties. Bob Woolmer, the hit coach of South Africa may have brought innovations into the game of cricket, but he should be punished for trying out a

one-way radiophone system with his captain in the field. The ICC must punish Hansie Cronje and Allan Donald for using ear-attachments in their match against India. It is time the ICC must take steps to save cricket from the onslaught of machine.

Pavan Malhotra, Patna (Bihar)

The orders of Sikkim High Court, regarding the article *Timber trouble* (*SUNDAY*, 20 December, 1998) have not been correctly published. In paragraph 2 of the order dated 4.12.98, it has been indicated that paragraph 4 of the report of the GOC reflected a very sorry state of affairs. This observation has not been made against the army authorities.

Rather, information furnished in paragraph 4 by the army authority has been appreciated. The observation "sorry state of affairs" has been made in respect of those responsible for illegal felling of trees. It has not been indicated in the order that the army personnel were responsible for illegal felling of trees in north Sikkim. It can be ascertained by CBI enquiry as to who is responsible for illegal felling of trees. Since army authorities do not have investigating agencies to register cases, investigation by CBI has been ordered. - Editor

SEPARATED AT BIRTH?

PH 25 RS 200 FOR CONTRIBUTIONS



Pradip Pradhan



Bimal Pradhan

Contributed by Bimal Pradhan, Calcutta (West Bengal)

MILESTONES

RELEASED: **Fit-Lt K. Nachiketa**, 26-year-old fighter pilot, on 3 June when the Pakistani authorities handed him over to the International Committee of the Red Cross.

RELEASED: **Najam Sethi**, Pakistani journalist, on 2 June, nearly a month after he was arrested from his Lahore residence.

CROSSED: by **Mohammad Azharuddin**, Indian skipper, 9,000 runs in One-Day



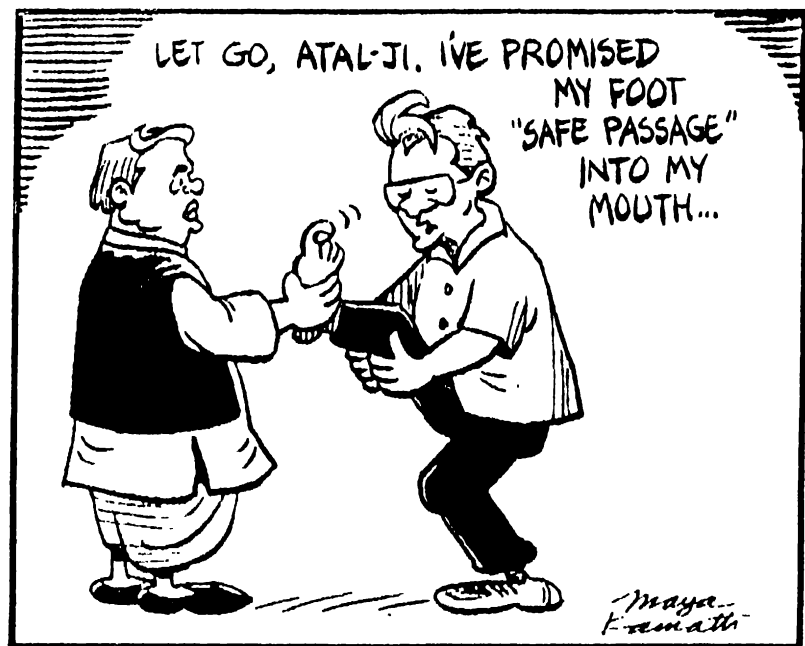
Internationals. He is the only player, so far, to have achieved the feat.

COMMISSIONED: the **INS Mysore**, the second guided missile destroyer of the Indian Navy. The 6,700-tonne warship's arsenal contains 16 surface-to-surface and two surface-to-air missile systems, torpedoes, rockets, a 100-mm gun and four 30-mm rapid fire guns.

DIED: **V.K. Saklecha**, former Madhya Pradesh CM, of a heart attack at Bhopal on 31 May.

DIED: **Shamim Jalpuri**, 75, Urdu poet, of a heart attack in Delhi on 30 May. Author of several poetry collections, he had also composed lyrics for films.

SIGHT & SOUND



MAYA KAMATH/THE ASIAN AGE

■ Well, original sin is a very interesting thing and I'm not interested in speculating on it.

JAMES RUBIN, US State Department spokesman, when asked to comment on Kargil intruders using Stingers, the missiles that the CIA supplied years ago to Afghan Mujahideen fighting the Soviet forces

■ Traitors should make it clear where their loyalty lies.

RAGHUNATH JHA, chief of the Bihar unit of the Samata Party, on party MP Shakunt Chaudhary, whom Laloo Yadav is trying to bring into the RJD fold and whose son Rakesh Kumar has already been inducted into the Babu Devt ministry

■ In the battlefield, one should not see whether one's adversaries are one's own brothers, friends or kinsmen.

M. KARUNANIDHI, Tamil Nadu CM, when asked whether his party, the DMK, would avoid fielding candidates from constituencies where the TMC will contest.



■ We in the Congress are the only ones who celebrate India's plurality. We do not inflame passions and we do not ignite differences between Indian and Indian.

SONIA GANDHI, Congress president

■ If I had my way I would have had the entire Indian team locked up in the Tower of London for ousting England from the World Cup.

LORD JEFFREY ARCHER, author and politician

■ Though the theme of adultery has been done several times, it has never been done so authentically. We don't have overt melodrama in *Saans*.

NEENA GUPTA, actress and director, on why her serial has clicked

SEEN

Waiting for Sushmita Sen

But the former Miss Universe didn't turn up



EARTHLY STARS: Sanjay Kapoor and Priya Gill at the press conference

The T-series studio complex, located at the edge of the national capital, in NOIDA, is distinguished by a gigantic statue of Lord Shiva. You have to crane your neck to see the head, from which the famed *jata* (locks) flows. And, if you look sharp, you can glimpse, among the statue's other accoutrements, a powerful bulb which lights up the lord's features and also serves as a reminder for us to look up to the heavens and pay occasional obeisance. On a rain-spattered evening last week, the film press had gathered there in a less-than-divine pursuit: of meeting earthly stars who live in Bombay and descend upon Delhi to strut their stuff. For a fairly out-of-the-way location, there was a healthy quorum, because among the starry contingent there was supposed to be Sushmita Sen, one-time Miss Universe, currently Bollywood's Number One Good Time Girl.

The Sen girl has been in the dumps for sometime. Her debut film, in which she played a persecuted beauty queen, crashed at the box office. So did her second. Fanzines reported gleefully on how she'd got herself a silicone enhancement, and how she wouldn't be able to keep anything close to her chest consequently. They tracked the break-up with her boyfriend, and how rival Aishwarya was forging ahead with big banners and plum roles.

She was all set to be written off before she began. Then came her latest release, late last month, in which she plays a model who wants it all and then some. She

takes a man away from his 'biwi number one', and relishes her victory in the most engaging, open manner, and looks gorgeous withal. Clearly, the lady has pizzazz and is drop-dead sexy, qualities the ascendant Zeenat Aman displayed while shooting down dowdy good little girls.

So we were all set for her, but when Sanjay Kapoor and Priya Gill, the leading pair of *Sirf Tum*, walked into the cavernous studio designated for the press conference, Sushmita Sen wasn't there. Lamented the guy who'd been sent to pick her up at the airport, "*Teen gaadi ley kar gaya tha, sab khali wapas laya hoon*", without enlightening us as to why he needed three cars to transport one Sen.

Asked a sly scribe of Sanjay, brother of the more famous Anil and Boney, "*Hamne suna hai aapke aur Sushmita ke beech kuch chakkar hai*." The actor deftly deflected that one, and moved on to more on the film and his plans for the future. Priya Gill, who's lately done a couple of no-account films, and who is also desperately hoping for a hit, spoke her piece on the importance of looking like the girl next door, the kind you could take home to Mummy. Not something you can accuse Sushmita of: she bares, she dares, and grabs all. The PRO who organised the show, and carefully elected not to tell us about her cancelling out, was lucky he didn't get lynched. •

Shubhra Gupta/New Delhi

Priya Gill, who's desperately hoping for a hit, spoke on the importance of looking like the girl next door, the kind you could take home to Mummy

Vajpayee's

Whatever happened to the Lahore spirit?



The Bus to Lahore has arrived in Kargil. All passengers are requested to get off and find their own way home. It has taken just a hundred days from euphoria to despair. When on

the eve of Vajpayee's visit, SUNDAY asked me to do their cover story on The Thaw, I asked: what thaw? I accompanied the parliamentary delegation that went to Islamabad and Lahore a few short days before Vajpayee's "historic" bus-ride. We went at the invitation of a newspaper group whose assets had been frozen by the Nawaz Sharif government and under the almost maternal care of a courageous, imaginative and well-meaning journalist whose car has since been torched, apparently by the goons of the Pak establishment.

As I recounted at some length in my cover story from Lahore, and since my return in *Mani-Talk*, the discussions with our Pakistani counterparts were long on *shair-o-shairi* and very short on substance. Indeed, every time an issue of substance was broached, differences came boiling up with such volcanic rage that the only way of preserving an atmosphere of cordiality was by skirting the simmering cauldron. The best bet was to leave it to masters of superficiality like Sushma Swaraj (if grammar permits one to call Sushma a "master") to pirouette before the cameras, mouth a meaningless phrase, and drown out differences in wave after wave of simulated emotion.

That in itself is useful, even necessary. Two nations caught in emotional



gridlock can find escape only through negative emotions being replaced by positive emotions. The relationship between India and Pakistan is overlaid so much by the lived or heard trauma of Partition that a readjustment of mindsets is

Whether for sustaining his government or seeking a fresh mandate, Vajpayee desperately needed the Lahore spirit. The Pakis calculated that would give them the advantage to make military gains on the ground before the realisation dawned that Vajpayee had not taken a bus to Lahore, he had been taken for a ride

the needed precursor to the settlement of disputes. Much barren effort has gone into the settlement of disputes. Little into the readjustment of emotion. So, visits by parliamentarians are important. But by no means a substitute for the hard

buslomaticy

bargaining of the negotiating table.

IT WAS JUST AS well that the MPs did not even begin to negotiate. Imtiaz Alam, our earnest host, had in mind an elaborate gameplan of closed sessions and issue-based negotiating groups that would get down to the nitty-gritty of all that divides us and, under the looming shadow of our new-found ability to blow ourselves up in a nuclear mushroom cloud, hammer out answers alternative to the excruciatingly slow and palpably inadequate progress of the foreign secretary-level official talks. Fortunately, neither set of MPs was in the least willing to assume a negotiating posture. For one thing, no one had the mandate to do so. For another, the Prime Ministers were scheduled within days to meet. What we could do was stoke the atmospherics. It was for the Prime Ministers to raise the substance of their talks to the heights towards which the prospect of their meeting had raised hopes in both countries.

I reported to SUNDAY from Lahore that there seemed nothing in the air to indicate anything other than hype. The foreign minister, Sartaj Aziz, had gone out of his way to organise a lunch for us very similar to the invitation extended by the stork to the jackal in Aesop's fable. For those unfamiliar with the story, I might mention that the stork had spread the feast in a bowl with a long, narrow neck, designed for storks to swill but impossible for the jackal to get his tongue to. In a similar manner, with the specific purpose of sabotaging any goodwill that the Jung Group's invitation to us might trigger, lunch was converted into a "briefing" at which, with the maximum offence that a foreign minister could give his guests, the Indians were subjected to an intemperate lecture on their many and varied defects.

The other minister to interact at length with the Indian MPs was former President Ayub Khan's son, Gauhar Ayub.

He got as good as he gave — but it is as clear that what he had to say was nearer the official position than the sweet nothings which swayed the faint hearts and which Sushma was matching verse for verse. None can beat Sushma when it comes to sweet nothings.

THE INDIAN HIGH COMMISSIONER invited us to a reception, but apart from that kept himself largely off the



K. RAGHUNATH AND SHAMSHAD AHMAD: the foreign secretary-level dialogue had not proceeded anywhere near the point where a dramatic political initiative might send the relationship soaring into a new dimension

conference. But one gleaned enough from him and other officials, Indian and Pakistani, to sense that with but hours to go for the Vajpayee visit, there was little focus on substance. The foreign secretary-level dialogue had not proceeded anywhere near the point where a dramatic political initiative might send the relationship soaring into a new dimension.

One had, therefore, to look to the possibility of a tactical breakthrough that might give such a fillip to the dialogue that instead of shadow boxing the negotiators could get down to sustained talks. As one who has been engaged, one way or the other (and, let it be added, generally on the periphery) of the India-Pakistan relationship for over two decades, ever since foreign minister Vajpayee chose me to open the consulate-general in Karachi, I had been concerned at the sporadic, intermittent and transitory nature of every attempt to begin parleys with the Pakistanis. It seemed to me that the key lay in persistence: when the two sides persisted, progress was possible, but if talks were broken off, or left suspended in mid-air, what little progress had been made in the negotiations vanished into thin air, leaving us where we were, often, indeed, far behind the starting point. Therefore, I have been suggesting where I can that the modalities of the talks should be so revised as to make the talks "uninterrupted and uninterruptable". That, I hoped, and said as much in SUNDAY, might be the tactical breakthrough Vajpayee should seek.

I might as well have saved my breath. The Bus to Lahore was neither about strategy nor about tactics. It was all about hype. It left people on both sides of the border mesmerised by a vision of peace, but nowhere near any resolution of differences. The dialogue was stuck, in substance, in its unproductive groove. Lahore gave the Hindutvists the undreamt of opportunity of tasting the kebabs of Lahore. Kebabs like none other. This, however, was not statesmanship. It was diplomacy at the level of Dev Anand.

BUT THE BUS TO Lahore did serve the immensely important domestic purpose of making the bumbling Vajpayee look like a world-class statesman. Following the Bomb, the BJP-led government now also had the Bus. To be followed a few

days later by the Budget. Bomb, Bus and Budget in hand, the government gave itself over to that unmatched impresario, Pramod Mahajan, to violate the sanctity of the Hauz Khas monuments to give his cohorts an anniversary bash.

And all the while, the Pakistanis were carefully unfolding their carefully laid-out plans to undertake the most serious violation of the Line of Control they had ever dared to even contemplate after the crushing defeat they had suffered a quarter century ago. With unerring accuracy, they spotted that Lahore was too important to the survival and image of the Vajpayee government for Vajpayee and his colleagues to jeopardise the good it would do them at the polls. Whether for sustaining his government or seeking a fresh mandate, Vajpayee desperately needed the Lahore spirit. The Pakistanis calculated that would give them the advantage to make military gains on the ground before the realisation dawned that Vajpayee had not taken a bus to Lahore, he had been taken for a ride. Indeed, it would have been a treat to watch the expressions on the faces of Pakistani ministers, army officers and ISI staff when they realised that the Vajpayee government's preparations for Lahore involved no ground assessment, through intelligence or army probes, of what was happening, or could be happening, along the northern salient of the Line of Control. True, this was the most difficult segment for Pakistan to cause us trouble without causing immense trouble to themselves. But, as the Pakistanis have shown in Siachen for a decade-and-a-half, they are ready to subject their soldiers to terrible privations to embarrass us militarily if they can.

IT APPEARS FROM EVERYTHING we have heard since the incursions in the Kargil sector became public that the government just did not take into consideration any possible Pakistani military action in the northern sector. Not even its successes seem to have alerted the government to what alternatives the Pakistanis might explore: after all, with the sealing of infiltration routes along the western alignment of the Line of Control, either the Pakistanis would have to acquiesce in the sealing off of their *jehad* — or shift its geographic locale to the north. The road, they knew, would be unguarded, left, as it were, to the care of General Winter during the winter months. Why not then do what the Indians had done at Zojila half-



GEORGE FERNANDES: he desperately kept out of public view any intelligence about the breach of national security taking place that might jeopardise the domestic prospects of his government

a-century earlier — The Impossible? Just as we moved tanks to heights never before attained in the history of tank warfare and thus captured the vital link between the Kashmir Valley and Ladakh, so the Pakistanis targeted the unmanned northern salient. Well-prepared and well-supplied, they waited out the worst of the winter, then moved in with rapier swiftness the minute the snows melted in April.

Meanwhile, the government in Delhi was falling. So, George Fernandes desperately kept out of public view any intelligence about the breach of national security taking place that might jeopardise the domestic prospects of his government. Not all his exertions stopped the Vajpayee government from going the way of all flesh. But the failure of the Congress to cobble together an alternative meant the off-chance of winning a quick election. Thus, while Vajpayee and his friends argued with the Election Commission the case for a June election, Georgie-Porgie kept under wraps the intelligence now piling up on his table of

the massive infiltration taking place all along the Line of Control from Dras to Batalik on the crucial ridge flanking and overlooking the Srinagar-Leh highway. A desperate ploy was resorted to, pretending nothing was amiss. The army chief was ordered off on a goodwill mission to East Europe. Fernandes himself took off to celebrate the silver jubilee of his terrorist activities of a generation ago. The country was not told that hundreds of square kilometres of our territory were now under the control of enemy hands.

To have confessed this would have been to confess that the friend who had hugged Vajpayee at Wagah was a latter-day Afzal Khan. This would do so much damage to the carefully-cultivated image of potential Nobel Prize-winner Atal Behari Vajpayee that confessing to Pak depredations in Kargil went hand-in-glove with appeasement. Every excuse was trotted out to somehow exculpate Nawaz Sharif for what had happened, and thus retrieve the tattered remains of the Bus to Lahore. One by one, the excuses trotted out by the Indian government to save the face of the Pakistan government fell to the ground. The snows of the Himalayas are being stained because the domestic compulsions of the Vajpayee government were given precedence over the imperatives of national security. It is a betrayal without precedent. •

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AUDITED FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH, 1999 (Rs. Crores)

	Year Ended 31st March '99	Year Ended 31st March '98
1. Gross Turnover	69,510.92	59,263.98
2. Income from Sales and Operations	63,661.38	59,832.08
3. Other Income	1,067.20	1,386.32
4. Total Expenditure	59,735.81	57,089.55
5. Interest	1,202.78	1,126.15
6. Gross Profit after Interest but before Depreciation and Taxation (2+3-4-5)	3,789.99	3,002.70
7. Depreciation	1,057.47	1,037.96
8. Provision for Taxation (Net)	519.00	258.24
9. Net Profit (6-7-8)	2,213.52	1,706.50
10. Paid-up Equity Share Capital	389.31	389.28
11. Reserves excluding revaluation reserves	11,879.51	10,224.87
12. Earning per Share (Rs.)	56.85	43.83
13. Cash Earning Per Share (Rs.)	84.01	70.49

NOTES: A The Audited Accounts are subject to review by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India under section 619(4) of the Companies Act, 1956. (B) The above results have been taken on record by the Board of Directors at their meeting held on May 28, 1999. (C) The Directors have recommended dividend @ 130% amounting to Rs 506.14 crores for the year 1998-99 as against 50% (Rs 194.67 crores) during 1997-98. (D) During the year Panipat Refinery with a capacity of 6 MMTPA has been commissioned. (E) The Corporation has taken appropriate and effective steps to be Y2K compliant by August, 1999. The expenditure to ensure Y2K compliance is not expected to have any material financial impact. (F) Figures have been regrouped wherever necessary.

By Order of the Board

Place : New Delhi
Date : May 28, 1999

Sd./-
(P. Sugavanam)
Director (Finance)

Vision Beyond Tomorrow

"Pakistan has a political

Defence minister George Fernandes on Kargil

SUNDAY: You went to Siachen on 12 May. At that time, no one told you anything about a build-up?

George Fernandes: My programme to go to Siachen had been fixed much earlier — seven or eight days before I was to go. It was a long programme — Siachen, Chushul, Uri, the whole area. I arrived at Thoise early in the morning and then I was at the base camp. I visited field posts. I had some programmes in Partapur so I spent the night at Partapur.

Late in the night, senior army officers posted there came to me and asked if I could possibly modify my programme because they needed the choppers for another mission. I was told that one of the local civilians in that area had sighted five or six foreign militants. He then reported this to the nearest army unit.

These people (senior army officers) then sent a patrol party to that region. The patrol party got ambushed. On the 10th they sent another patrol party which also got ambushed and that is when they realised that this was much more than some stray incident. That is when the whole process of activating the military establishment began.

I arrived there on the 12th and on that night I got the first information. I surveyed the whole area using a fixed-wing aircraft and flew to Srinagar. There, the corps commander said operations were on. He said things were under control and we should get back the ridges that had been occupied in a day or two.

When I returned I asked for a situation report. I found no mention of this in the routine sitrep. When I asked what was going on, I was told those chaps are there, but we will have the situation under control soon.

Q: So we're still to get a full appreciation of the size of the problem?

A: No, now we're totally on the job. We have pictures. We know their location. We know where they are. I've toured the terrain. I've seen the mountains and the extent of the problem. I have no doubt that we're doing our best. But I don't think flushing them out is that simple. There are the weapons, the men from the other side...

Which is why I'm a little worried about the way the media are projecting things. At the end of the day, the army is not the one taking decisions.

I've seen the area. It is hard to keep casualties down and yet get our territory back. So I've just told the press that one option could be that if the Pakistani government wants to talk about it, we could say that if they want to push their troops back we won't object to it.

Q: But, as of now, the orders are: eviction?

A: Yes. What else can we do? It is not just that area. It is the whole country. We have to see how the country feels about this. That is as important.

Q: What seems to be the Pakistani gameplan?

A: One thought that comes to mind is: we have cleared the Valley for all practical purposes. This is not to say that insurgency has been completely wiped out. But we have things under control. Economic activity is on in full swing. Daily inflow of tourists in Kashmir today is 2,000. When we closed down the airport there was a hue and cry — both from those who were supposed to go there and those who were to come back here.

The other side realised that the Valley is not available at the moment for any kind of trouble, because the people there now have jobs and they are learning to live life as it should be lived.

So those who thought this up felt that they must look for another front and what better than this unoccupied territory? There are other political aspects too: you occupy this territory and move forward. Taking forward steps for better infiltration. Since the usual routes are closed because of effective

patrolling and effective interceptions, you look for new ones. This is terrain where interception would be next to impossible.

So one can see that they have a political objective vis-a-vis Jammu and Kashmir.

Then there is a short-term political objective of internationalising the J&K issue — making it appear that there is fighting here and we're nuclear weapons powers, so the world should take note.

"I have no time for academic arguments: should we have come here? Should this area have remained unoccupied for so many years? Shouldn't we have patrolled it like Siachen?"

Q: Do you think this has happened because the government was lulled into complacency because of the Lahore bus trips?

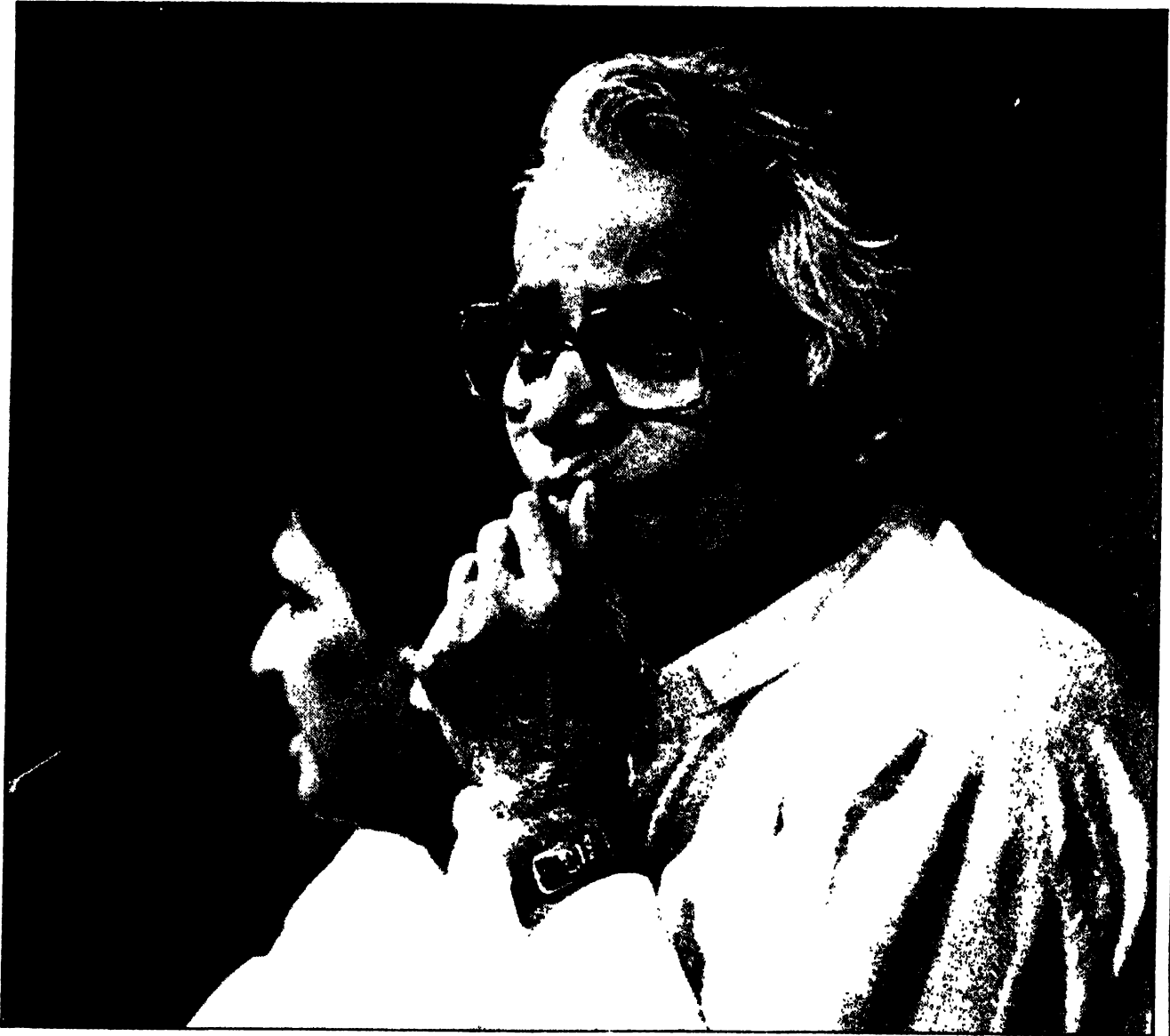
A: People are saying this because they have no clue, neither about the way military intelligence is collected nor what the problem in that area is about. It is easy to tell the government you people were trying to pretend that it was all okay and that nothing was going to happen.

But this is an area where there hasn't been a post for the last ten years. This is not something that has happened today or after 19 March last year or before. This has been the case.

Q: What kind of options do you see now? When you say 'defuse the situation' how do you see defuse? We're not going to stop firing?

A: Defuse is not a word that fits into this situation. There is only one way of defusing it: that you go back. You can't sit on a mountain top and say: let us defuse the situation. What does it mean?

"Objective in Kashmir"



What option do we have? I have no time for academic arguments: should we have come here? Should this area have remained unoccupied for so many years? Shouldn't we have patrolled it like Siachen?

In many ways this is a much more difficult terrain than Siachen. I met soldiers in the base hospital. Some regiments which have been hurt but not so badly as to keep them in bed for long surgery, are rearing to rejoin battle. Others have more serious injuries.

But all of them have told me how difficult the terrain is. There are some areas where soldiers had to walk for 24 hours just to reach the point where the conflict was taking place. Some had to walk 48 hours, carrying equipment and their guns.

If this is the kind of terrain we're talking about and we got the first information on 6 May, then I don't think that people across the LoC could have collected there very much before that. This is not the kind of region where you can live and prepare for war months in advance.

Q: What happens now?

A: The manner in which our political parties are acting and behaving doesn't give the impression that there is a collective mind here which is at work. And this needs to be set right. All shoulders to the wheel is what needs to be done. •

Interviewed by Aditi Phadnis/New Delhi

The Peacem

But despite his best efforts defence minister George Fernandes seems to be the favourite political punching bag of the nation

IF THE DELHI chatterati had its way, George Fernandes would have been drawn, quartered and hung outside Khooni Darwaza by now.

The defence minister can say or do nothing right. He's the one who landed us in a soup with China: why did he have to say China is our number one enemy, says Sweetie Aunty, dewlaps quivering with indignation as she passes the cashewnuts around with the drinks. Uncle Mickey (aka Malkeet Singh Sandhu) moves his bulk from the deep armchair and grunts as he bends down to adjust the air-conditioner. Bloody politicians, he says, adding with quiet satisfaction, that's why I've never voted in any election...

Remember how he threw Coke out of India, exclaims the 30-something, US-educated Tony (aka Tarun Manchanda) smoothing back his gelled hair. His companion, she of the pouting lips and the little black dress, shudders delicately. When do you think the war will end? she asks plaintively. When George Fernandes stops offering safe passage to the Pakistanis, says Uncleji, roaring with laughter. Everyone joins in dutifully, though unsure of the joke...And so it goes on.

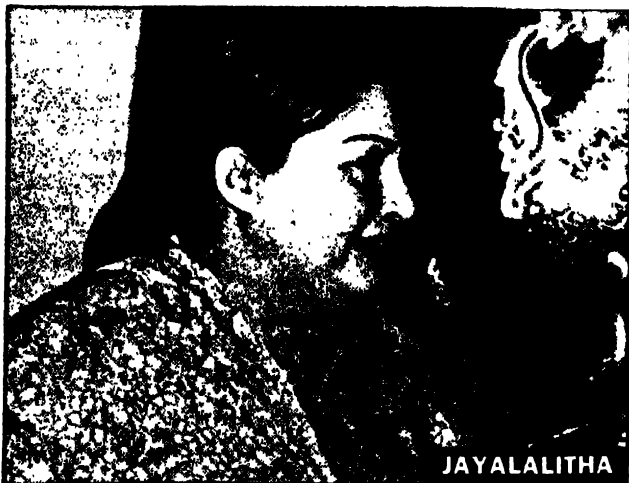
If you haven't added your voice to the demand for George

Fernandes' resignation yet, there has to be something wrong with you. The Indian middle class has it all worked out: George Fernandes has a history of being a maverick. He's perfect grandstanding to a fine art, he says things only to get media attention, he's an irresponsible opportunist and he is certainly not fit to be defence minister.

The politically correct among them are even more categorical: Fernandes has betrayed the bigger cause by going over to the BJP, he's the Christian stooge among the knickerwallahs, a Trojan horse among us.

In other words, among the 4 per cent of India's intelligentsia, which is among the 8 per cent of the India's upper middle class, which is 16 per cent of India's middle class, which is 20 per cent of India's population living in the metros — George Fernandes makes for a great political punching bag. And in this current Kargil round, George-bashing is at its most vicious.

THE LAST TIME a defence minister was in this kind of trouble, India was involved in a real and humiliating war, not a combined failure of field and military intelligence. V. Krish-



Among the others who have sought Fernandes' resignation

aker

na Menon, resigned owing responsibility for India's failure to repulse aggression by China. Facile comparisons are being drawn between Menon and Fernandes.

George Fernandes is no Krishna Menon and the army of 1962 is not the army of 1999. Fernandes is an organiser, a man who has made and unmade trade unions and political parties. He is not a political dilettante. What is more, he is a successful organiser. How many modern leaders have built a political party from scratch, adhering as honestly as possible to principles of inner-party democracy and freedom? Organisation, that too in a state like Bihar?

Oddly enough, the most grievous attack on Fernandes comes from the very constituency which once considered him its own. Inder Kumar Gujral, former PM, who considers Fernandes a good friend and H.D. Deve Gowda, former PM, who was with Fernandes in the same party not so long ago, have both bitterly criticised him. In his letter to the Prime Minister, Gujral has even suggested that Fernandes be given some other portfolio because he is not responsible enough to hold down the present one.

In his letter Gujral said that Fernandes was "temperamentally unsuited" to the defence ministry. Referring to the PM's conversation with him at the all-party meeting, Gujral said that some doubts had been raised about Fernandes' statements at the meeting. "You had tried to modulate those feelings. Like others I had hoped that at least your counsel of moderation would make Mr Fernandes tone down his subsequent utterances. The irony is that despite protests from your own party, the honourable minister does not appreciate that his office demands added restraint. As a result, once again the govern-



The Indian middle class has it all worked out: Fernandes has a history of being a maverick. He's perfected grandstanding to a fine art, he says things only to get media attention, he's an irresponsible opportunist and he is certainly not fit to be defence minister



ment is speaking in varied voices and tones as was witnessed soon after Pokhran-II. This must end."

Among the others who have sought Fernandes' resignation are Jayalalitha, Subramanian Swamy and the Congress. Their reactions are predictable. For several months now, Jayalalitha has been looking for excuses to attack the BJP-led coalition. Fernandes is one of those excuses, easier to attack because he has a high profile. For Swamy, George Fernandes represents what he would like to be and cannot be.

But it is the Congress attack which has to be taken a little more seriously. Is the Congress right when it says that Fernandes is playing a role and making statements which are "untimely, irresponsible and demoralising"? The Congress says Fernandes is more concerned about the well-being of the aggressor than the defence of the nation. Is this correct?

are Jayalalitha, Subramanian Swamy and the Congress

The Making of Martyrs

"IT'S ALL FRESH in my mind, as though it happened yesterday," said the officer accompanying the bodies of five war martyrs, including two officers, Lt.-Col. R. Vishwanathan of the Grenadiers and Captain P.V. Vikram of the artillery.

It all happened on the fateful morning of 2 June. Troops of this Grenadiers unit were on the verge of capturing the Barbaad post at about 15,000 feet in the Drass sector. All the hardships of harsh weather and difficult heights they had been facing since their arrival on 21 May from Doda seemed to disappear as they neared their goal.

Barbaad was about to fall and the very thought of it "sent in a gush of blood coursing through our veins" said the officer.

The unit was only a few hundred metres from the peak. So close, that Captain Vikram reportedly radioed to his superiors to stop artillery firing lest the shells land on the advancing Grenadiers.



The coffin carrying the body of Lt.-Col. R. Vishwanathan.

"There was no response from the post for more than an hour and Tiger (the commanding officer) ordered us to go for the kill," the officer said, his voice pausing abruptly and softening. "We knew Lt.-Col. Vishwanathan (the second in command of the unit) would not let this opportunity go. He was the one who had led the attack till then."

So Vishwanathan, his observation post (artillery) officer, Captain Vikram and seven soldiers advanced to take on Barbaad around 2.30 am.

Describing the final moments, this officer looked upwards as he scratched the stubble on his chin (an army officer is exempt from shaving while serving in high-altitude areas). He swallowed and said, "Everyone was tense, waiting for Lt.-Col. Vishwanathan's confirming words over the radio... It was no near, yet so far."

Then it finally happened. At 3.20 am, Vishwanathan responded in the affirmative. For a moment, there was jubilation. Twenty minutes later, there was no response on the radio. Pakistani artillery had fired from across the LoC. Sounds of jubilation were now replaced by cries of desperation.

"The Pakistani guns continued to roar and our unit had to fall back on our artillery to respond," explained the officer.

The fighting went on. The Grenadiers regiment did get their moment of glory a few hours later. But five of the nine, including Lt.-Col. Vishwanathan, who had led the earlier mission with Captain Vikram, had sacrificed their lives for their country.

There was a brief silence as this officer completed his narration, which was broken by a listener. "True martyrs," he declared. A ghost of a grin ran across the officer's face. He said: "Not martyrs, they are the heroes of Barbaad."

Pranab Dhal Samanta/New Delhi

CONSIDER THE "CONTROVERSIES" Fernandes has got into over the Kargil war.

The first was about a "clean chit" to Pak PM Nawaz Sharif. Did Fernandes issue a clean chit? Fernandes says he was in a Cabinet meeting when he was accosted by the press. They wanted to know his reading of the situation. "I told them, I'm not going to tell you where I'm getting my information from. But we have definite information that this is an army-initiated, army-planned and army-executed plan. The government was not in it when this operation started and got into it only in the implementation mode. The ISI which has the reputation of interfering in various places was not involved in the planning of this exercise. But once the operation got into operational mode, then there is no question of making any distinction. It is the Pakistan Prime Minister who is chairing the strategy sessions," Fernandes said.

The fact that a senior bureaucrat in the PMO repeated this information to a set of journalists in a select briefing indicates that it wasn't Fernandes who went off at half-cock. The whole government was privy to this information.

"Today the situation is: India is fighting Pakistan and Pakistan is fighting India. So there is no question of giving any 'chit to anybody'," said Fernandes.

Is there any reason to disbelieve this?

You could argue that by making a public statement, the defence minister curtailed the options for diplomacy. But it is hard to understand how.

The point is the intensity of collective howl that greeted Fernandes' statement, although there were others in the government who were saying exactly the same thing.

The second controversy was the so called 'safe passage' which Fernandes is supposed to have offered to the intruders to return home.

This too has provoked a fiercely angry reaction, quite out of proportion to the suggestion.

As defence minister, Fernandes has been deeply concerned about the deaths in the war. He knows that given the terrain, nothing except hand to hand combat is likely to succeed. Air power has only limited efficacy in mountain fighting.

In all their briefings, the defence services have told Fernan-

des that it could take a long time to win the war. The longer the war goes on, the more casualties there are likely to be. One way out of the impasse is to resolve it diplomatically and give the Pakistanis a way out of the situation and also stop the killing — to offer a chance to the Pakistanis to retreat and move backwards on their own.

So when he was asked whether India would consider safe passage to the militants without killing them, he said this was something that could be considered.

BUT HE HADN'T contended with the chattering classes of India. Instantly this was interpreted as selling out to the Pakistanis. "They give us bullets, we give them biryani," was the slogan of 1994 when the Hazratbal siege was on. Memories of this were rekindled.

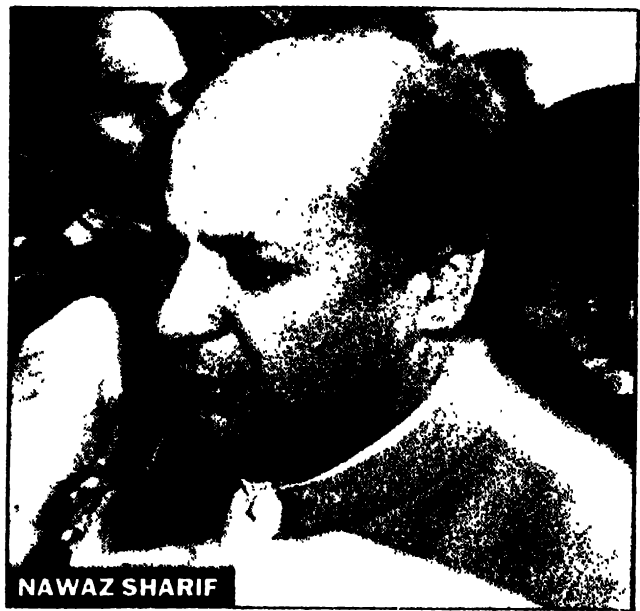
The mistake Fernandes probably committed was not consult the army before he made this suggestion publicly. The army, unused to the politics of statements and newspaper columns, found itself completely confused. If the intruders were going to be given safe passage, what role did they have? Why were they getting killed in Kargil?

As Opposition parties and venerable former Prime Ministers pounced on Fernandes' and later Atal Behari Vajpayee's statements, it became clear that India had reached the lowest common denominator in politics. Fernandes was unexpectedly cynical about these reactions. "What's new about attacks (on us)?" he told SUNDAY. "That's all they (the Opposition) can do."

But Fernandes is over-simplifying the situation. This is not a simple case of a difference of opinion between the govern-



I.K. Gujral: In his letter to Vajpayee, he suggested that Fernandes be given some other portfolio because he was not responsible enough to hold the present one



"The (Pak) government was not in it when this operation started and got into it only in the implementation mode...But once the operation got into operational mode, then there is no question of making any distinction. It is the Pak PM who is chairing the strategy sessions" — George Fernandes

ment and the Opposition. There is a bigger issue here. It is a matter of establishing patriotic credentials.

Nothing sells like nationalist machismo. Although the Congress says it will support the government on the Kargil war, it needs an enemy to attack. So do I.K. Gujral and H.D. Deve Gowda. It would be politically incorrect to criticise Pakistan and its people. An enemy easy to attack is George Fernandes.

In 1962, when India and China fought a war, the enemy the Opposition chose at the time was the Communist Party of India as the Jan Sangh and the Swatantra Party and a large number of Congressmen felt a push would topple the CPI, which was already mortified at the shame of what a communist nation had done to India.

Speaking in the Lok Sabha, an angry and defensive CPI MP Renu Chakravarty supported the Congress government and its defence minister. She referred to a statement by Frank Antony, that India needed to become "brutalised". She said: "We are not going to be brutalised. We are a great people, passionately proud of our independence. We shall defend our motherland. We shall hold on to our basic policies and we shall try and raise the prestige and honour of our country. We know that our cause is just and it will triumph. In this hour of trial, the communists will prove their worth. They will side with the people."

Why can't I.K. Gujral and H.D. Deve Gowda, and even K. Natwar Singh, the greatest supporters of peace between India and Pakistan, be as generous? Why pick on George Fernandes? All he's trying to do is bring about peace with honour. •

Aditi Phadnis/New Delhi

Flashpoint

Taking full advantage from the world focus on Kosovo and euphoria over the bus diplomacy, Pakistan has succeeded in doing a Siachen on India

WHETHER ONE LIKES it or not, one has to concede that Pakistan's intrusions in Kargil have set the cat among the pigeons. No one in Pakistan in the know of the scale of these operations could have imagined it would lead to creating a warlike situation for India. Four small pockets of intrusion across the Line of Control (LoC) have not only mobilised the army but also the country.

But for two diversions, the country could be deemed to be at war; the World Cup and the elections. From the mood in the country, it is difficult to tell which of the tests was more important — the one at Kargil or at Manchester.

So far the main battles have been fought at Delhi instead of Dras between a nitpicking Congress and the government with even Inder Kumar Gujral sniping at the defence minister. Unfortunately even in matters of national security, this country can't achieve consensus.

The operational situation remains foggy partly because of the weather over Kargil but also because intelligence about the enemy is slow to come by. The exact scale of the opposition in the intrusion zone one month after the aggression was still being collated and assessed.

Understanding ground and terrain is key to comprehending Pakistan's strategic goals as well as appreciating the extreme difficulty in overcoming the mountains. For both sides, especially India, it is as much a conquest of terrain as it is of the enemy.

By the time you read this report, the war will have entered its third week. Hopefully, the Tiger Hills and Tolulings would have been captured and the enemy pushed back but at a high human cost. Until last week, only a trickle of body bags was arriving in Delhi that would inevitably change into a stream.

The first offensive was launched last week. Before that it was reconnaissance in force accounting for nearly 70 killed and more than 200 wounded and 14 missing over 30 days.

There are two extreme views on Pakistan's intrusions in Kargil. It is a master stroke or a misadventure. First the master stroke. Through a carefully-crafted infiltration, Pakistan deployed a couple of hundred regular soldiers and Mujahideen 4 to 6 km across the LoC completely surprising the army and leading to a warlike situation. Taking full advantage from the world focus on Kosovo and euphoria over the bus diplomacy, Pakistan has succeeded in doing a Siachen on India.

Through this low-cost, low-risk intrusion, Pakistan would



bring J&K on the front burner, at the same time test India's resolve under a caretaker government to defend J&K. By subsequently raising doubts over the demarcation of the LoC it hoped to de-freeze the status quo.

The intrusion force was assigned multiple tasks; establish bases on ground across LoC overlooking the Srinagar-Leh highway from where it could preferably physically, or at the least, by observed artillery fire, interdict this road; expand the bases for infiltration by the Mujahideen into J&K to revive the insurgency. The bottomline was: hold the intrusions to the last man, forcing the Indian army to evict them. This is the trap.

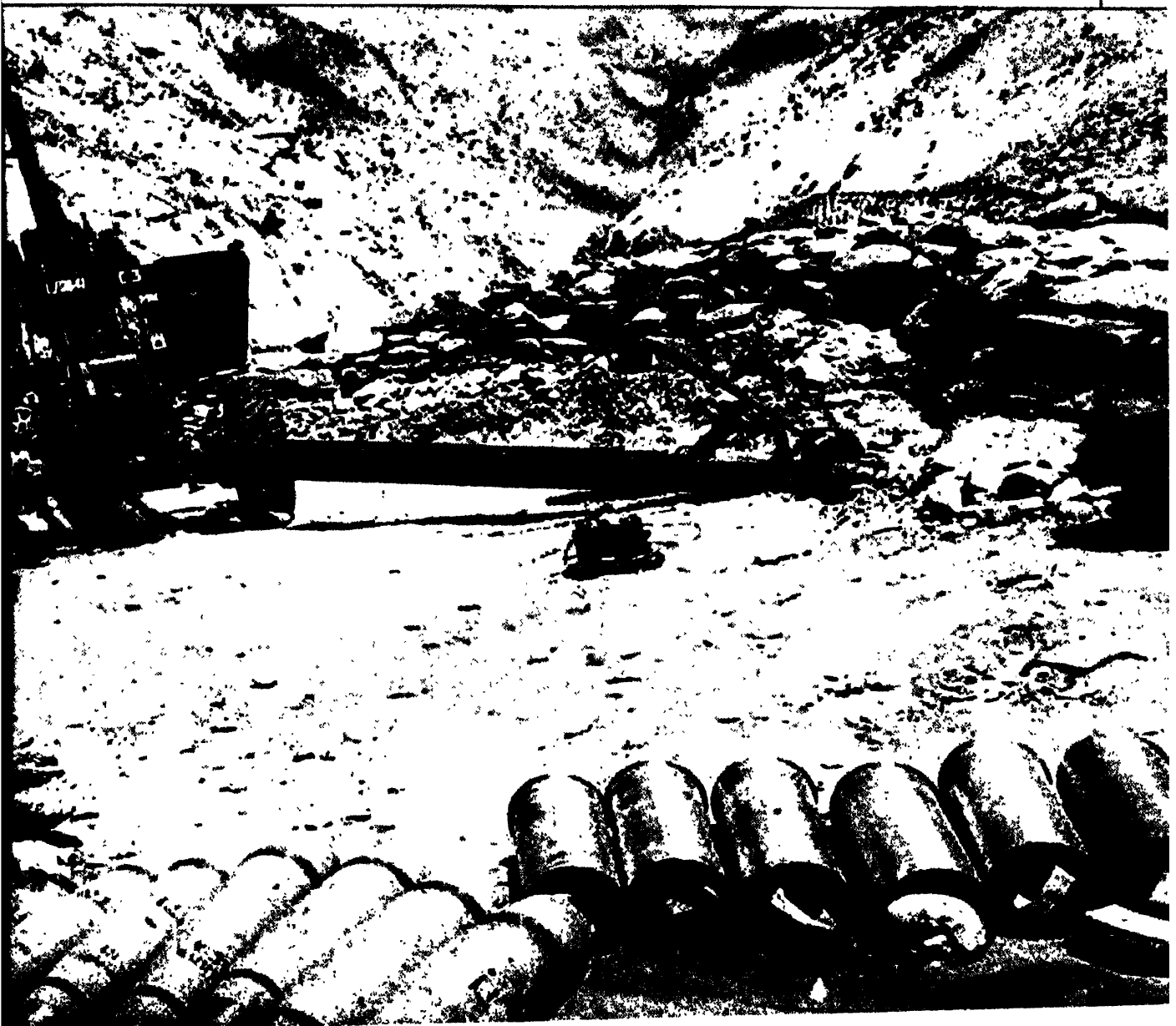
THE MALIGNED VIEW preferred by the military says the Pak Army gamble in Kargil to create an upheaval in J&K has once again, failed. It would have assured the political leadership of creating a situation that would force India to go to the United Nations to make Pakistan stop the aggression. Instead the operation has boomeranged. Forty-five days after the intrusions, these have been sealed and rolled back. Pakistani milita-

ry strategy is seen to have come a cropper.

The mask of Islamic militants over the aggression has come off. The intrusions are being seen in world capitals as Pakistan-sponsored and instigated. Sufficient physical evidence such as army pay books on dead bodies is available to nail the Pakistan Army's direct involvement. The violation of the LoC and blatant disregard for international law and treaties would show up Pakistan, the new nuclear weapons state, as a failing if not failed state, shaping into a rogue state.

Having achieved its political and, to some extent, military objectives, Pakistan was pressing for negotiations to defuse the tension. But India will not let it get off the hook so easily. Even if the military costs are high.

This game of intrusions — land grab — across or on LoC is as old as the Line itself. Over the last 52 years, Pakistan has frequently attempted to alter it by force, attracting Indian retaliation. But after the Simla Agreement of 1972, cases of intrusion went down. However, a new bunker, sometimes a new post, would come up overnight on the Indian side.



In defence of George

Fernandes doesn't deserve Shut Up Or Get Out

Instead of training their guns on the intrusions in Kargil, the Congress and other political parties have been lambasting defence minister George Fernandes for speaking out. Fernandes is a seriously misunderstood defence minister. Despite the Vishnu Bhagwat affair, he must be one of the most capable and dedicated ministers of defence India has had for decades. He doesn't deserve Shut Up Or Get Out.

On a blue Neel Gagan slip pad, which he carries all the time, there are diligent notes on the Kargil campaign from Mashkoh to Batalik. He understands the ground and the difficulties of terrain better than any other politician in this country. He has seen the hills, the slopes and the folds in the mountains from the air and on map. He follows each battle whether at Point 5140 or Jabbar Ridge with great care. He feels for every casualty suffered, every man lost.

Fernandes has done a lot for the armed forces but not enough in bridging the gap within the services and be-



ween them and the ministry. But he has tried. He has toured extensively the defence establishments in India as no previous minister. His grasp of strategic matters is laudable. So is his interest for improving the lot of the ordinary soldier. He has visited Siachen five times, a feat all the defence ministers put together since 1984 have not equalled.

Service officers regard him as Our Man despite the perceived partiality towards the bureaucracy. Fernandes is well-meaning, even if sometimes provoked into shooting from the hip. At least he dares to shoot. His comment on safe passage, for example, is not entirely objectionable. There is plenty of diplomatic, even military, sense in it. Only the timing was inopportune. Creating conditions of siege is a prerequisite for a safe passage and is not easy to achieve in the given terrain. It is quite likely that Pakistan may be pressurised by the West to vacate the aggression for which safe conduct is very much on the cards.

The row over the clean chit to Nawaz Sharif was similarly premature. Given Pakistan's diffused power structure and the army and ISI being centres of power it is quite possible Kargil was the army's secret show, and for that very reason, shared with the Prime Minister just before or after it was launched.

Fernandes says he never made the remark about evicting the Kargil infiltrators in 48 hours! All this is not meant to be a clean chit for George Fernandes. It is reaffirmation of the military's shared and experienced confidence in its minister. Who the rank and file find a welcome change from previous incumbents.

In the Kargil sector, in 1989-90, Pakistan regulars had intruded in Dras and set up a post at Dalunag. A combination of military action, dialogue on hotline and flag meetings were required to vacate this intrusion. Similarly in 1993, Pakistan occupied some abandoned huts in the Kirni sector of Poonch and built up a company-sized post, forcing the army to launch a brigade attack for its eviction. But the classic case is of OP Hill in 1965 which was the most costly eviction operation in LoC history. The message consistently given to Pakistan is: you can't alter the LoC by force.

INFILTRATION THROUGH KARGIL is not a new phenomenon. The first recorded attempt through Mashkoh was made in 1991. The second was accidentally intercepted by a 5 Gurkha patrol in November 1993. The eyewitness account of this classic ground action in Mashkoh-Dras was published in SUNDAY (13-19 February, 1994) describing the ferocity of fighting in high-altitude terrain.

India's military response has been constricted by the limits on its options by the inviolability of the LoC. Also, by the nuclear deterrence in place that ensures it is held below the threshold and kept localised. Therefore, the military has a cut-and-dry task: to evict the intrusions from Mashkoh to Batalik.

Unlike Pakistan, India's military action to vacate the

aggression contains no element of strategic surprise. We are committed to throwing out the enemy behind the LoC. The sheer predictability of the operational strategy and the high-cost tactics of clearing the intrusions should persuade India towards also attacking Pakistan where it is pointedly weak — on political and diplomatic ground.

The main battle was joined last week. It will be a long haul restoring the LoC. Pakistan would seem to have achieved its strategic goals without paying a price for its aggression so far. It is the Indian Army which would be bled.

Now there is no escaping from discussing with Pakistan, J&K. When the war is costed and its lessons assimilated, old issues will also beg resolution. The questions of the defence budget, use of army in internal security duties, holes in intelligence, defence reforms, jointness in army-air ops and a new combined doctrine for LoC and acquisition of long overdue military equipment to fight the proxy war.

In Sri Lanka the IPKF fought a better armed and equipped LTTE. In Kargil too, the intruders have the edge in hand-held and portable weapons and equipment.

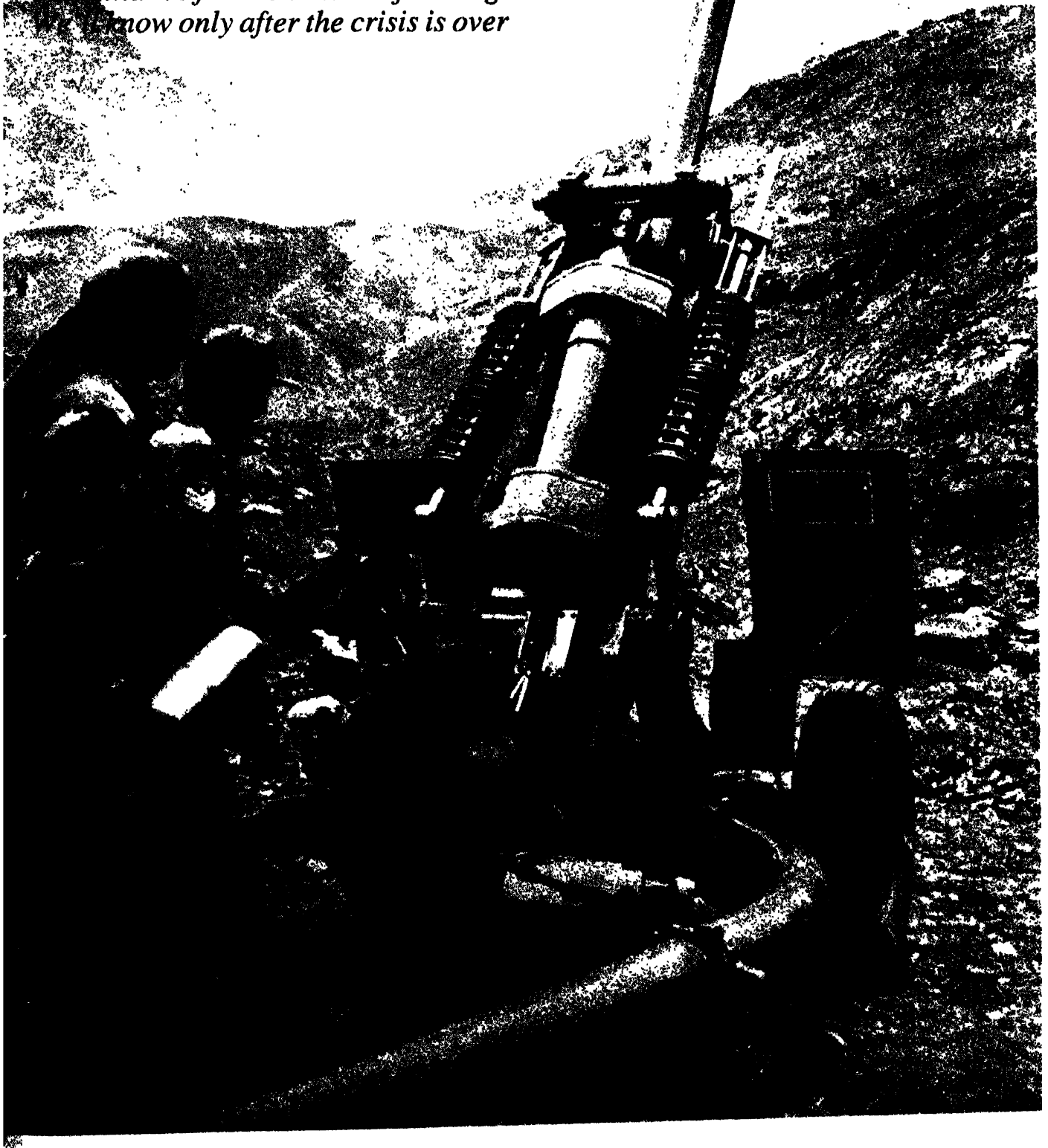
The Kargil fiasco has tied down a nuclear-capable India at the level of Pakistan whereas its aspired strategic reach is China. •

Maj. Gen. Ashok K. Mehta/New Delhi

SPECIAL REPORT

Mortal Combat

*Surveillance failure or lack of intelligence?
We know only after the crisis is over*



Eighty kilometres to the north-east of Srinagar, the road that runs to Sonamarg is the beginning of a sweeping panoramic landscape within the Himalayas called Ladakh. Sonamarg — the meadow of gold — is a quiet, flower-carpeted valley that lies on the eastern bank of the gushing Sindh. Further on, past this idyllic land, Zojila Pass (11,000 ft), the starkly-splendid rooftop of the valley, blends treacherous peace and high-tension conflict where the serenity of the snowcapped peaks can be shattered by artillery boom fired in retaliation to the shelling from across the border. The going becomes more dangerous as one leaves behind Zojila and moves on to Dras. It's a high-altitude battle zone in Kargil and Batalik sector where Indian Air Force (IAF) fighter planes have been pressed into service to dislodge more than 600 battle-hardened infiltrators (backed by Pakistani regulars) from Indian positions held on the high Himalayan peaks along this side of the Line of Control (LoC) in Kargil.

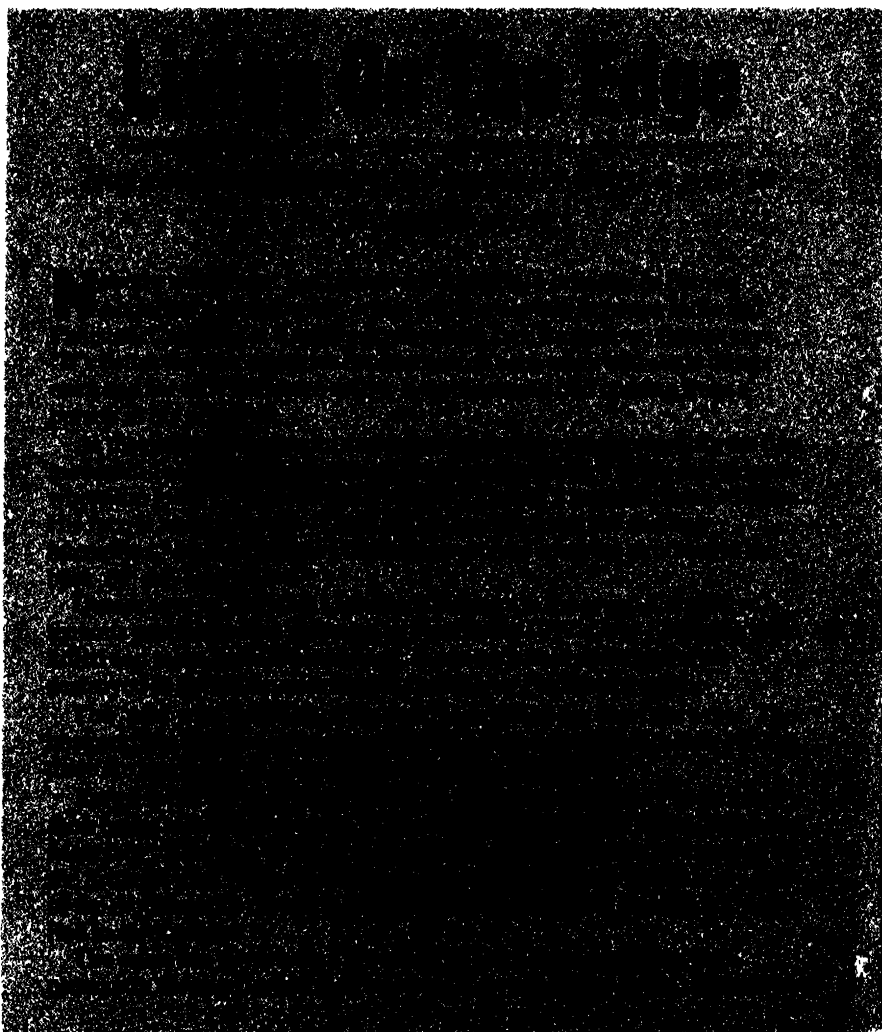
The conflict is now four weeks old and the army is said to have gained considerable ground in some sub-sectors. But despite the gains, a stiff battle is still on in Dras' Tiger Hill and Batalik sector. Nobra valley and the ridge between Turtuk and Chorbatal were the other areas engulfed in the acrid smoke and fire of heavy exchange of artillery. Resistance put up by the intruders from their vantage points not only resulted in heavy loss to Indian troops but also suggested a certain level of motivation and training for the infiltrators.

Nobody knows exactly when the infiltrators crossed the Line of Control and occupied Indian positions. Not even the intelligence agencies including the IB and RAW. "It could be sometime in February or March this year," says one officer. Lt-Gen. H.M. Khanna, GOC-in-C Northern Command, does not rule out the possibility of intrusion in November when Indian troops came down at the start of winter. Defence experts, however, say that intrusion of such calibre and concentration must have taken place even before November. It's impossible, they argue, to raise such concrete underground bunkers at 16,000 or 17,000 feet in winter when the temperature comes down to minus 30 or 40 degrees.

There will be arguments and counter-



Arms captured from slain Pak soldiers in Batalik





their own houses and starting their own settlements inside Zaskar valley. 65 migrants were seen in the house of one Syed Ali. Ali's house has 11 rooms. The members are 23 Syed Akbar, his wife, four sons, Kanon, Timbas, Solakota, Faran, Lakshmi, and a daughter. The government looks for the migrants in the villages where they are settled. The government has asked the villagers to report the migrants to the government. Ali Akbar, who is a migrant, says that he has been in the village for a long time. He says that he has been in the village for a long time. He says that he has been in the village for a long time.

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Qamar Ali Akhron talking to migrants

arguments, but the fact of the matter is that the army, deployed to man the borders in this bone-chilling mountainous desert came to know of the intrusions only on 7 May when two reconnaissance patrols mysteriously disappeared in Kak-sar and Batalik peaks where they had gone to examine the possibility of sending troops to summer positions. It took the army another two days to know that militants had infiltrated almost seven kilometres deep inside the LoC over a stretch of 70 km border line from Batalik to Dras. The army and intelligence authorities are now apparently involved in a bitter row over the intrusion along the Ladakh border. Army authorities describe it as a case of "intelligence failure". Intelligence officials say that it was "operational failure" on the part of the army. Displaying diplomatic tact, Lt-Gen. Khanna steered clear of a controversy when, during a press conference in Srinagar, he avoided pointing a



It's a raw deal for these migrants from Dras

direct finger. "I will not call it intelligence or surveillance failure," he said, "it is rather an unexpected development." What exactly happened can only be ascertained after the crisis blows over.

Flabbergasted army authorities initially tried to play the whole thing down. "There is nothing serious," said Lt-Gen. Krishen Pal, commander of the Srinagar-based 15 Corps. "It's a local problem and we can tackle it locally." Defence minister George Fernandes went a step ahead. He said that the intruders would be flushed out in 48 hours. Empty rhetoric really. What it reveals is shameful lack of information. Because, in their very first attack on Indian positions, the militants inflicted heavy losses on the Indian troops. Subsequent attacks on infiltrators' positions too hadn't much of an impact until at a high-powered meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) on 25 May, it was decided to involve the air force.

It was a crucial decision. For the first time in the post-1971 War history of India and Pakistan, India was using its

air force to defend its borders. The results were almost immediate: over 200 infiltrators reportedly died in the aerial attack. The figure rose with every passing day. Army officials also claimed that some of the intruders were flushed out of



Lt-Gen. H.M. Khanna says the intrusions may have been in November

a few strategic positions. But there's little to buttress the claims. The army has so far recovered only three bodies describing them as Pak regulars. Pakistan's response was stiff. It shot down two fighter jets and warned of more anti-aircraft strikes if any more jets intruded into their air space. A day later, the infiltrators shot down another combat IAF chopper, leaving little doubt of their firepower. "It will take some more time," is almost the general refrain with every army and defence personnel, though none offers an exact idea of how much time it will take.

In this inaccessible terrain, it could be months. Back in 1947, the Indian army took almost three months to flush out invaders who were then armed with ordinary guns. Given the precarious situation, it's difficult to predict how things would turn out. But one thing is clear. The barren mountains of Ladakh are certainly another Siachen in the making — a longer and more death-stalking battlefield that would cost both in terms of men and material. •

Rashid Ahmad/Kargil

Battle for the sky

PTV's malicious propaganda against India needs to be countered



The Government of India has at long last banned PTV in the country. The move has come as no surprise to television viewers here as PTV has caused enough damage to Indian

interests in Kashmir and other border areas. Although I am not in favour of banning or preventing any television signal because you cannot force viewers to go by your choice, PTV deserves it and I hope Pakistani viewers should also lodge a protest over the performance of their national network.

As far as India is concerned, PTV has launched a vicious, fabricated and malicious propaganda against India. It seems that the entire TV network does nothing except abuse India. PTV seems to be obsessed with Kashmir. It has to give wrong information on Kashmir every day. Its anchors lie confidently misleading its own viewers.

I can understand its policy of condemning India and running a campaign on Kashmir, but this can be done in a more dignified manner which will not only convince Pakistani viewers, but also force Indian viewers to pay attention. It will get some international viewership also.

Unfortunately, even in the eyes of Pakistani viewers, PTV has no credibility because it does not even have an iota of truth. Those who have watched PTV news during the Kargil crisis must be laughing at it.

According to PTV, Indian troops are scared of infiltrators, they are not joining after leave and infiltrators have almost defeated them. Both the Indian Army and government are highly demoralised and Pakistan has won this round of battle.

PTV is doing nothing but fooling its own people. This is the reason that very few Pakistanis watch PTV and most of the time they view Indian satellite channels like Zee, Sony and STAR Plus. Indian entertainment programmes are very popular and even serials like *Mahabha-*



On the Kargil front: PTV is distorting reality

rat have got a high viewership. Almost every Pakistani watches Hindi movies on Indian channels.

Doordarshan has also got viewers in Pakistani border towns like Lahore. But it does not run any campaign against Pakistan. If it wanted it could have easily run a campaign on Mohajir problems through news, serials and chat shows. It would have attracted viewers amongst Indian Muslims, too. But nobody did it.

Not only has PTV been unfair to Indian viewers, but also to Pakistanis. Programmes are of inferior quality. Discussions, chat shows, interviews, soaps and musical programmes are below standard. Reception quality is very bad. And when Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif himself tried his best to make Vajpayee's Lahore visit successful, PTV played it down.

I must also criticise Doordarshan and the I&B officials for not wooing the viewers of Indian borders and Kashmir. They should have more programmes in local languages based on local culture at regional centres. They need to upgrade high-power transmitters less than 10 kV. In places like Baramulla, Kupwara, Udhampur, Kathua, Drass, etc., these are only available at Doordarshan centres of Srinagar and Jammu. But the programmes at these two centres are not visible in rural areas.

Apart from this, they only show national programmes and there is very little scope for local programmes. They also require to set up earth stations, but Delhi is not paying any attention while Pakistan has deliberately put up high-power transmitters on the Kashmir border to lure the local populace. •

How to end the party

G.K. Moopanar should know

This is the story of a man who had it all and chose to throw it all away. Congressmen still remember how G.K. Moopanar and K. Karunakaran sat in a small office in the AICC at 24 Akbar Road and met all the MPs from the Congress Parliamentary Party one by one, ostensibly to elicit their views on who should be the CPP chief. But actually to bludgeon them into voting for P.V. Narasimha Rao. The challenger at the time was none other than Sharad Pawar, and it was the job of these stalwarts to ensure that Rao got the votes of the MPs.

They succeeded in their mission. The Congress had come to power after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. So the party was trying to adjust its enormous bulk into thinking about life after Rajiv.

Moopanar had always admired Indira Gandhi and did his best to help her son. It was a family relationship.

But now the situation was different. There was no Gandhi family, no Rajiv Gandhi. Pawar was seen by many senior Congressmen as a Johnny-come-lately. It was important to ensure that the ethos of the Congress was kept alive.

Narasimha Rao did win that contest and Moopanar was thanked in no small measure for the victory. But having said thank you, Rao also said goodbye.

For five years, Moopanar hung in a limbo in the Congress. Rao told him that his support was important for the government. But his advice about how to run the state party affairs was not taken.

Meanwhile, Jayalalitha, whose AIADMK was supporting the Congress government at the Centre, became chief minister. Moopanar's long

night began in Tamil Nadu.

Moopanar supporter P. Chidambaram's convoy was attacked as it was moving towards his constituency. Similar attacks — with acid bulbs and eggs — were mounted on the cars of M. Arunachalam, also a central minister. Law and order was a state subject. How could the state government ignore attacks on two members of a Union government it was supporting?

Both ministers took it up with their leader, Moopanar, who went to Rao. All Rao could tell them, with folded hands, was: My government is in a minority, the AIADMK is supporting me from the outside. Please don't rock the boat.

Moopanar and Co. took all this. But they were aghast when, towards the end of the five years of Rao's rule, the Congress paid no attention to their prediction that the AIADMK was hopelessly unpopular and would win no seats in the forthcoming elections. When the high command wanted to tie up with Jayalalitha yet again, there was a revolt in Tamil Nadu.

Moopanar was still bemused by how it all happened. But Congress workers who were against aligning with Jayalalitha because of the way she'd been humiliated by her, captured Sathyamoorthy Bhavan, the state Congress headquarters. They burnt up furniture, tore up Rao's portraits (stamped and urinated on them as well) and chanted slogans against Rao.

Moopanar had two options. Either he could ride this wave of anger or let someone else benefit from it. For the first time in his life, egged on by his supporters, Moopanar became a subversive. He launched the Tamil Maanila Congress — the 'real Congress'.

Tying up with the Dravida Mun-

netra Kazhagam through intelligent seat adjustment, the TMC coasted to a spectacular electoral victory. It was blood and sweat all the way. But the reward was a total wipe-out of the AIADMK.

That was in 1996. The TMC became a partner in the United Front, determined to give strength to a third alternative and oppose the Congress. But the Congress, too, was trying to reinvent itself. Two Congress presidents and one general election later, Sonia Gandhi came on the scene.

Now it was a different ball game. The anti-Jayalalitha feeling on the ground still existed. But the people on the top had changed. Heading the Congress was the daughter-in-law of Indira Gandhi, a woman Moopanar would cheerfully have laid down his life for. But like Rao, Sonia, too, was talking to the AIADMK. And there was still an alliance — however tenuous — between the DMK and the TMC.

The moment came soon enough. The TMC had to decide who it would vote with: the Congress, which was beginning to hobnob with Jayalalitha, or the BJP which was being supported by the TMC's friend and ally, the DMK.

A debate raged in the party. Going with the BJP meant betraying its Muslim base. But going with the Congress meant a return to Jayalalitha and even a possible general election.

The nightmare scenario became a reality. Moopanar couldn't bring himself to vote against the Congress. The BJP government fell and with few resources and even less money, the TMC was thrown back into elections, the same as everyone else.

All for the love of one family.

G.K. Moopanar is a nice man: he doesn't manipulate. He is truly democratic and encourages young talent, delighting in the success of young proteges. Which is why he is such a good man and such an unsuccessful politician. His party, in which so many Congress workers had vested so much faith, is on the verge of being obliterated: either into the Congress or from the political scene of Tamil Nadu.

And Moopanar, who held sway in the hearts of thousands in Tamil Nadu as a principled, brave patriarch, is happy to throw it all away. •



V. BALLOPA

Three days with the Naxalites in the jungles of Dandakaranya

It was pitch dark as we made our way into the jungle. We, the two armed guerrillas of the CPI(ML) People's War and myself, were walking without uttering a word. Shifting my bag from one shoulder to another, I dared to ask, "*Aur kitna chalna hai* (How much more to walk)?" "*Aadha ghanta aur* (Half an hour more)," replied the man in front, carrying more weight than me over his shoulder and back including a .303 rifle. He was Badranna, in his mid-twenties and commander of the Madded Dalam in Dandakaranya. And bringing up the rear was the teen-aged co-commander, Prabhakar.

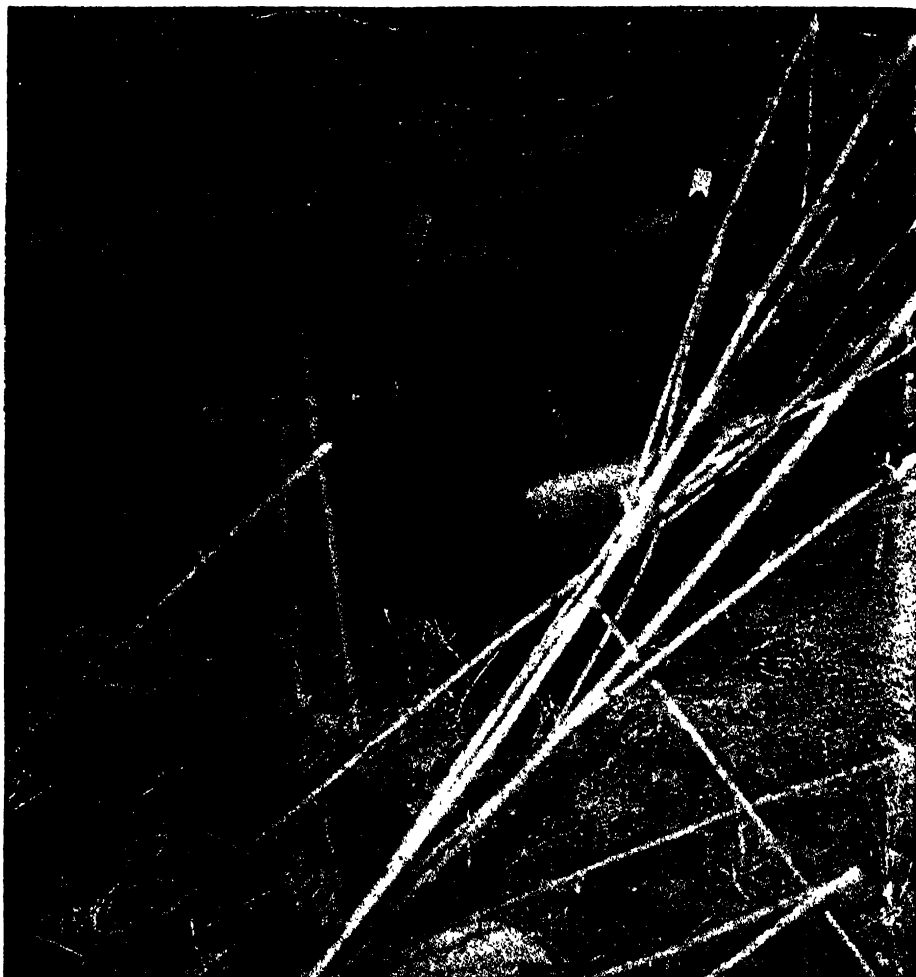
I was going to meet a top brass of the CPI(ML) People's War — yes, People's War and not People's War Group as it is generally known — the largest Naxalite outfit in the country on its invitation.

"You are safe, don't worry," said Badranna as we started exchanging more words. "You are unsafe with the police only. Even if they collide with a tree they open fire," said Prabhakar, "they can't come here, we are too deep in the forest."

Soon we came across a small village somewhere on the border of Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. The duo stopped. Dinner was

Naxalites: Bastar is the main place

CLOSE EN



DESH-DEEP SAXENA



DESH-DEEP SAXENA

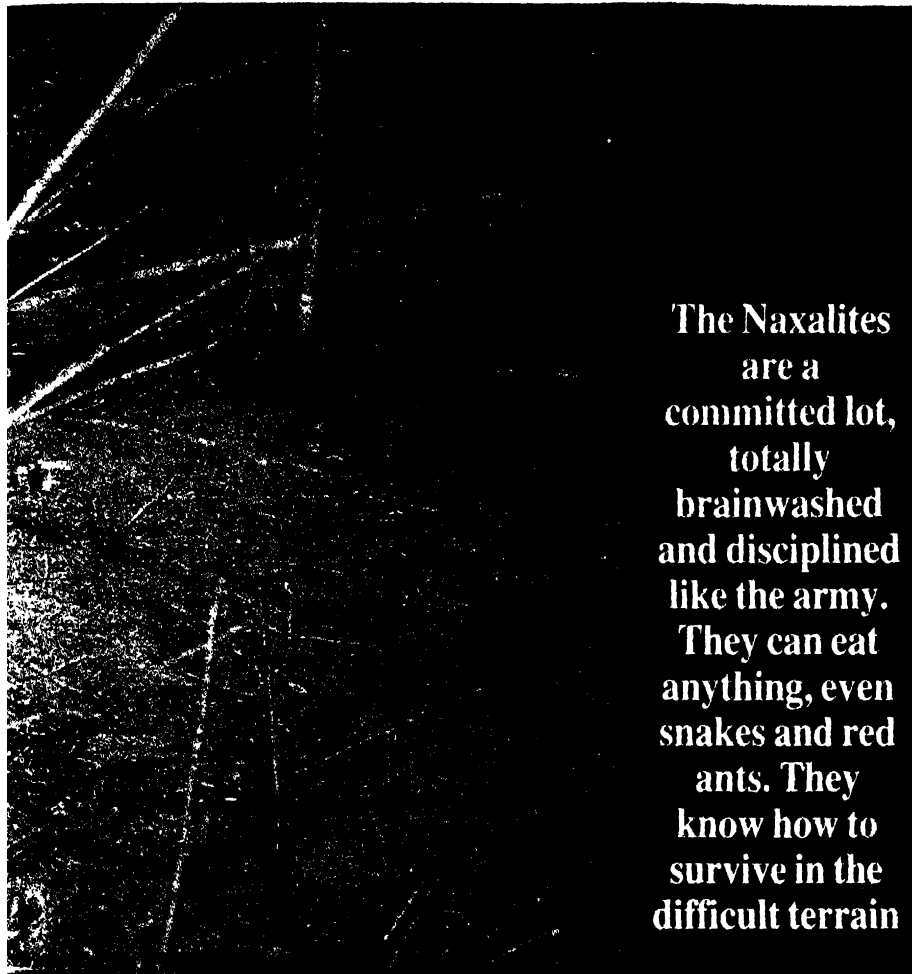
ready. One of the residents welcomed us. When I asked Badranna how much longer to go, he replied, "*Pahle do ghanta chalna phir rest phir, do ghanta aur* (Two hours of walking, then rest, finally another couple of hours)." I realised that distance is measured in minutes and hours and not in miles or kilometres.

Exactly two hours later, Badranna stopped, put his baggage down and said, "We will sleep here." "Here?" I looked around in fear. But I was too tired and so were they. Finally, we turned in for the night.

I could hardly sleep when it was four in the morning. We got up. Again, the journey began.

The morning was quite pleasant. We walked for two more hours but the destination was still not visible. Then we spot-

COUNTER



The Naxalites
are a
committed lot,
totally
brainwashed
and disciplined
like the army.
They can eat
anything, even
snakes and red
ants. They
know how to
survive in the
difficult terrain

ted a few tribals who were plucking *tendu* leaves, a big issue in Bastar. Badranna exchanged *lal salaam* with the tribals, who then escorted us to the camp. The Naxalites, including three girls, lined up immediately and gave us a guard of honour. We shook hands. I introduced myself.

I met Lachanna, one of the founder-members of the Dandakaranya special zonal committee (DSZC). In 1983, when he came to Bastar he was only a squad member. In 1988, he became commander of the divisional committee and a year later he became secretary of the Bastar divisional committee. In 1990, he became a member of the DSZC.

Bhupati, the DSZC secretary, is also a member of the central committee (CC) of the CPI(ML) PW, the apex body of

the outfit. Lachanna carried an AK-47 over his shoulder with a few magazines strapped across his chest. He also carries a reward of Rs 10 lakh announced by the government of Andhra Pradesh.

Lachanna stops me when I try to take his photograph. "Please don't take my photo as the police doesn't have a recent one..." I spent three days with him and his soldiers. Hot afternoons and cool midnights interspersed with a few showers.

The CC is the highest decision-making body followed by the state committees and special zonal committees. There are only two such committees which are engaged in armed guerrilla struggle.

Last year, the PW got a major breakthrough, says Lachanna, when the CPI(ML) Party Unity was merged with the PW. The PU is very strong in south-central Bihar. Talks are on with the dreaded Maoist Communist Centre of Bihar, which is strong in central Bihar.

"There are some differences between us and the MCC over some national and international issues," says Lachanna. "Once the differences are over it will strengthen our movement. It will facilitate our functioning in Sarguja and Raigarh areas of Madhya Pradesh."

The Naxalite problem is confined to not more than six districts in MP and the PW wants to extend it further. But in AP the Naxalites are present in 23 districts.

Though it is surely a socio-economic problem and not a law-and-order one, no government is being sincere in tackling

Naxalite women: equal partner in people's war



'Whatever we had planned, we achieved'

Lachanna on the Naxalites and more

He is one of the most wanted Naxalites. One of the founder-members of People's War in Bastar, the soft-spoken Lachanna has a reward of Rs 10 lakh on his head. Speaks Telugu, Hindi, English and all the tribal dialects of Bastar. As a student of class seven he joined the Radical Students' Union. At the age of 20, he joined PW.

Lachanna, 38, spoke to SUNDAY from his forest hideout bordering Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra.

SUNDAY: Have you achieved anything?

Lachanna: Whatever we planned, we achieved. We came with nothing in 1982-83 and our task was to form guerrilla zones. We came with a small squad. When we landed in Bastar the tribals were in very bad shape. They were treated as animals. We mobilised them. It was a difficult job but we did it, created awareness among them.

We mobilised them into various organisations. We wanted to form guerrilla squads. From guerrilla squads we went ahead with platoons. *Woh bhi shuru ho gaya* (That has also begun). Gram raj has also started. We are on the right track (smiles).

Q: Why did you choose Bastar?

A: Because this is the central part of India. See the terrain and the jungle. It is very important strategically. Ideal for guerrilla warfare. You can go north as well as south. You can also talk to Bihar as well as Rajasthan. Conditions are favourable and this is the main place for revolution in India. This is extremely important for People's War.

We came to Bastar in 1949-50 when armed struggle in Telengana was on. Military was engaged to suppress the armed struggle of farmers. At that time it was decided to spread the movement.

Q: Why guerrilla warfare? You don't believe in democracy?

A: Where is democracy? We live in a semi-feudal, semi-colonial era in India like in Europe. Democracy in India is a farce, a fraud. I will tell you how it works in India. A village head will tell the voters whom to vote and

DESH DEEP BAKHNA



"When we landed in Bastar the tribals were in bad shape. They were treated as animals. We mobilised them. It was a difficult job but we did it, created awareness among them"

they would do the same, head of a particular caste will dictate his term to the people of his caste and they would follow and a community head would do the same thing. Moreover, a husband will tell his wife whom to vote. Is it democracy?

In true bourgeois democracy everybody should be free to take his or her decisions. But there is no democratic consciousness because feudalism never ended in India. Karl Marx said, 'When there is no democratic consciousness, democracy is a fraud. Which is why our revolution is known as New Democratic Revolution, *janwadi kranti*. We are struggling and fighting for the democratic rights of the people. We are people's army.

Our culture, Ramayan, Mahabharat, encourages feudalism...go to exile in the forest for 14 years. In our culture, there is no place for the development of democracy.

The Rajas are continuing. *Gwalior ka raja, Arjun Singh bhi raja, Digvijay Singh bhi raja*. They are MPs and they are chief ministers. Now about their party. They will have some meeting of the CWC. Nobody knows what resolution they pass. In the end they say they have authorised Sonia Gandhi to make so and so the chief minister of such and such state. They call it democracy. Election Commission says there are no elections within the parties. See Bal Thackeray (laughs) he is there for the whole life.

Who has given America the right to bomb Kosovo? Any of the five Security Council members can veto 185 countries. You call it democracy? Today, there is no democracy anywhere in the world.

I don't understand (laughs again) the government asks us to come into the mainstream and teaches us democracy.

Q: But will democracy come by this AK-47?

A: No, we never say so. It will come by people's revolution and for that you need people's army, otherwise they will crush you. We guide from the jungles and people will do the rest. They will become the writers of history.

Q: How large is your area of influence?

A: Should be larger than Bangladesh.

Q: How do you procure arms?

A: There are three ways. Snatch them from the enemy (police), self-produce and purchase. We can prepare grenade launchers and .12 bore rifles among other arms and ammunition. We purchase it from anyone, from any smuggler.

Q: Even from the LTTE and Kashmir militants?

A: No. The LTTE itself has said that they themselves need arms, leave aside selling others. No question of Kashmir militants.

Q: But there was some training by the LTTE.

A: Policemised the country. Aman — who was earlier in the LTTE — gave us some training. Otherwise no truck with LTTE.

Q: And Kashmir...

A: We support the JKLF's struggle. We have no interaction with them. This is our international stand. Whoever wants separate nationhood, we support it. JKLF wants a separate nationhood. But not the Hizbul Mujahideen which wants to merge Kashmir with Pakistan.

Q: How do you get money to purchase arms?

A: We collect it from contractors from the areas of our influence.

Q: By extortion?

A: No, no. We collect taxes. It is in lakhs.

Q: How many lakhs...10, 15, 50 or more?

A: (Laughs) It is in lakhs. We send the whole money to the central committee every year, which in turn distributes it.

Q: Why do you oppose the construction of roads?

A: Because the government says the roads are for development. It is fraud. You have travelled from Jagdarpur to this place, have you seen development? Whatever road exists in Bastar was constructed by the contractors of bamboo for transportation. The Adivasis are still ill-fed, ill-

clad and illiterate. They want to construct roads to crush our movement.

Not only roads, we also oppose the construction of the Dalli-Jagdarpur railway line. As iron ore starts exhausting in Dalli, Bhilai Steel Plant turns to Bastar for exploitation. The railway line is not for tribals' development but to get the iron ore from Raighat to Bhilai.

Q: Is the police your enemy number one?

A: Yes. Because it is corrupt and indulges in loot and arson. Atrocities

ARSHAD KHAN



are being perpetrated on the tribals in the name of anti-Naxal movement. Innocents are booked under the National Security Act. It is police raj in Bastar. We never attacked the police till 1991 but it always attacked us. Now we have also started initiating. Still, if we find an unarmed policeman we never touch him.

Q: Has Digvijay Singh offered you to surrender?

A: It is again a fraud. Not a genuine offer. He asks us to surrender and at the same time demands more funds from the Centre to fight us.

First of all, he should remove the police posts and additional forces, withdraw fabricated cases from the innocent people, give more money to *tendu patta* labourers, prepare a conducive atmosphere and then we will be ready. He is not genuine. I think he wants to talk to us in heaven.

the former. "Successive chief ministers in Madhya Pradesh say it is a socio-economic problem," says Lachanna, "but they have done very little. There is no political will."

Still the police suppression is creating more and more Naxals in Dandakaranya. Take the case of Jhitru, a teen-aged Naxalite and bodyguard of Lachanna. "The police took away Rs 1,000 from my house and harassed my family as they were members of the Dandakaranya Adivasi Kisan Mazdoor Sangam." It is an organisation of the PW which creates awareness among tribals, farmers and labourers. It works openly. "When

"I think he (Digvijay Singh) wants to talk to us in heaven"

police continued to suppress our family one day I fled and joined PW," says Jhitru who misses his family. "Sir, we were innocent."

Parvathi is another case. During my stay with the group I never saw her mingling with her fellow comrades. She would take her meals alone. Badran-na told me that her parents have died. She, too, is a victim of police atrocities. When the police tried to molest her, she ran away and joined the PW. She is a good shooter now. "I will never miss a cop's head," she says.

According to Lachanna, the police in Bastar resort to atrocities to suppress the movement. These include: arresting the family members associated with other PW organisations, indulging in loot and arson, insulting womenfolk at times even indulging in rape, fabricating false cases against tribals including taking recourse to the National Security Act.



DEEPA SAXENA

The police are also forcing young girls into early marriage. Especially the members of Krantikari Mahila Sangathan, an organisation mobilising tribal women, claimed Lachanna.

Champalaxmaya, president of the DAKMS in south Bastar, was taken away by the police in 1994. He is still missing. His wife is in a bad shape, says Lachanna. She doesn't know whether she is a widow or not.

"If this is a democratic country anyone can participate in a people's organisation. It is our right," the bearded Naxalite says quoting the MP Chief Justice, A.K. Mathur, "Most of the people in the country are not aware of their rights." We are making people aware. And when an enlightened tribal asks for his right, the government termed him a Naxal, he says.

The local people in Bastar — the tribals — extends excellent support to the Naxalites. With extremely sensitive eyes and ears and knowing the terrain like the back of their palm coupled with the cooperation of the tribals, the Naxalites are surviving the gruelling conditions.

For more interaction, the Naxalites hold meetings with the villagers. They are also doing some development work

Badranna (in military fatigue) with villagers: for a people's revolution

The government is trying to fight the PW by hook or by crook. It has raised a group of antisocials. It is trying "to break the confidence developed between the tribals and us", says Lachanna

like digging of lakes, plantations, building check dams, et al. The Naxalites do not fail to entertain. They sing songs, both political and emotional. They narrate tales of atrocities of the police, civil and forest contractors and how *dada log* (Naxals) hounded them away. One to one relationship is developed instantly, which the government has failed to do, despite having immense resources. It has rather alienated the tribals. There are still several villages where the government has not yet reached.

Instead, it is trying to fight the PW by hook or by crook. Lachanna says that the government has raised a group of antisocials. Some of them are ex-Naxals, who go around assaulting villagers. This way, the government is trying "to break the confidence developed between the tribals and us". They are doing it on the lines of the SULFA (Surrendered United Liberation Front of Asom) militants. "These SULFA-type Naxals are dangerous for us and we have already identified them. They are trying to malign us. We will teach them a lesson."

The Naxalites are a committed lot, totally brainwashed. They are disciplined like the army. They can eat anything, at times of crisis even snakes and red ants. They know how to survive in the difficult terrain.

My return journey was even more difficult. Four Naxalites saw me off. There were at least three occasions when they feared the police was around and I took cover behind trees, while they took positions. We reached a village where we took our morning tea. One of them got out of his uniform into lungi and banyan and escorted me to a bus stop in a village near the last tahsil town of Madhya Pradesh. •

Deepa Saxena/Bastar

Too many cooks

Politicians, bureaucrats and army officers add to the confusion over Kargil



No one should be under any illusion about how stupendous the task on the bleak heights of Kargil, Dras and Batalik is. The air strikes and the ground action against the invaders of the Line of Control (LoC) are in full swing. They are effective enough and are producing results. But it will take weeks before the last of the invaders, fully trained and extremely well-equipped, is either driven out or annihilated. There can be no quick fix.

Firmness of the Indian resolve to liquidate the armed intrusion bordering on aggression is accompanied, however, by restraint. That is why this country has confined all its military action to its side of the LoC which both neighbours are committed to respecting anyhow as much under the Simla Agreement of 1972 as under the Lahore Declaration, signed amidst much enthusiasm only a 100 days ago. India does not need to escalate the conflict beyond the Kargil region. Pakistan is in no position to do so because of a wider war's catastrophic consequences for it, given the perilous state of its economy and the refusal of all major countries to heed its shrill cries for internationalising the Kashmir issue.

No wonder then that statements from Islamabad, especially by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and foreign minister Sartaj Aziz are moderate enough. Wild rhetoric is left to information minister Mushahid Hussain. Actions are more important than words, however. Sharif's insistence on sending Aziz for talks to Delhi and A.B. Vajpayee's agreement to play host to the Pak foreign minister speak for themselves. Especially in view of the clear Indian stipulation that no issue other than Kargil will be discussed; nor will there be any pause or let up in the air and ground strikes on the armed intruders from across the LoC who include both the Pakistani Army regulars out of uniform and Islamist mercenaries trained and indoctrinated first by the Afghan Taliban and then by the ISI. Jason Burke of *The Observer*, London, has exposed the antecedents and affiliations of these "freedom-fighters" thoroughly.

Ours is an age of instant global information and communication. Inevitably therefore, information warfare has become an integral part of military action on the ground or from the air. What a devastating use of information warfare can be made is demonstrated around the clock, every day of the week on CNN and BBC in relation to NATO's deplorable war on Yugoslavia, backed by moral fervour on behalf of the Kosovar ethnic minority. Tear-jerking scenes of Kosovar refugees are displayed on TV screens with great skill. Bombing of civilians, of the Chinese Embassy and even of Albanian territory are explained away as "accidents" or "unintended mistakes".

In New Delhi's cloistered corridors of power, however, the age of information warfare is yet to dawn. Damning evidence of the regular Pakistani soldiers being involved in the Kargil outrage is piling up. For reasons difficult to fathom, it is not being shown on TV nationally and internationally.



There can be no explanation for George Fernandes' gratuitous statements giving a clean chit about the Pak perfidy in Kargil to not only Nawaz Sharif but also the unspeakable ISI...He has also compromised military ethos by dragging senior army and air force officers to a BJP meeting. He has become as bad a liability as Krishna Menon was in the early Sixties

The worst part of the government's functioning, even in the midst of a grave crisis arising from an unacceptable attack on its security, is that different ministers, officials and even officers of armed forces are talking in different voices and superimposing avoidable confusion on the nation's anxiety about national security.

Ironically, the worst culprit in this respect is the man in charge of defence, George Fernandes. A maverick given to bizarre eccentricities at the best of times he seems to have run amuck at this critical juncture.

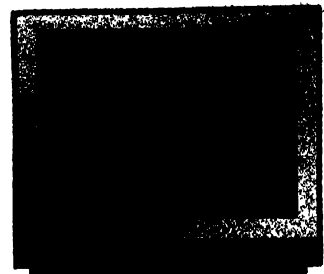
There can be no other explanation for his extraordinary and gratuitous statements giving a clean chit about the Pakistani perfidy in Kargil to not only Nawaz Sharif but also the unspeakable ISI, described by an astute American analyst as "more vicious than the KGB and the CIA's department of dirty tricks put together". He has compounded this egregious lapse by reaffirming his scandalous statements. He has also compromised military ethos by dragging senior army and air force officers to a BJP meeting. Sadly, Fernandes has become as bad a liability as Krishna Menon was in the early Sixties. •



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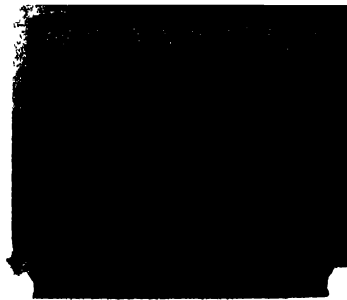


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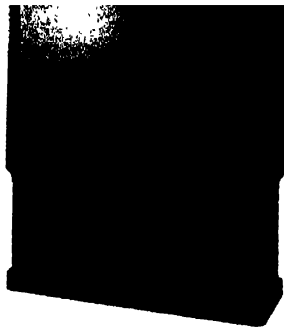


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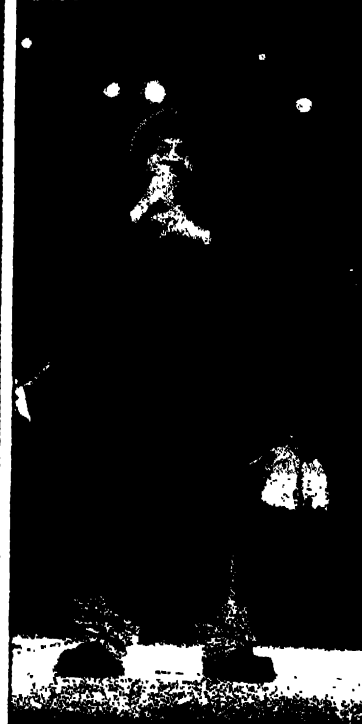
Sharmila Tagore: in aid of AIDS control

CLOSE CALLS

The *bhangra*-pop star, Daler Mehndi, with his *balle, balle* music has been spending sleepless

PHADIP SANYAL

Daler Mehndi: security check



nights over the threat calls he's been receiving from Dawood Ibrahim's right-hand man, Abu Salem.

The pop star has informed the police in Bombay and Delhi as well as the Intelligence Bureau. The second call was received only a few days ago and this was traced to Abu Salem's mobile number.

With Daler Mehndi on an all-India tour, his security is now going to be a major problem for the organisers. No more *sadde naal rahoge to aish karoge!*

IN AID OF

Of all the glamour-pusses who have joined the AIDS *andolans*, Sharmila Tagore is the latest one. She has been allowed

entry into the haloed portals of the celebrity club of which the likes of Richard Gere and Shabana Azmi are members.

The heart-throb of the 60s was named adviser to the Delhi AIDS Control Programme. She hopes to

be an effective bridge between the NGO's and the government agencies.

However, exactly what dimplecheeks will do is as yet uncertain. But jumping on the AIDS bandwagon has always been a sure-fire way to become rich and famous.

BEYOND BARRIERS

Guns may have been booming on the border, but in Delhi it was all very civilised.

Pakistani singer Farida Khanum came to the Siri Fort auditorium wearing a saree to sing at Marasim, the friendship concert hosted by an Indian charity to celebrate the Lahore Declaration. Such as it is.

The Indian side was

represented by Jagjit Singh who enthralled the crowds as he sang ghazals written by Gulzar.

Marasim was inaugurated by Atal Behari Vajpayee and the

poet in him did not recognise the "warlike situation in Kashmir." And the musical soiree so enthralled him that instead of 20 minutes, he stayed for over two hours.



MATCH POINT

Love abounds on tennis courts these days. While Davis Cupper Gaurav Natekar and seven time women's national tennis champion Arti Ponappa have decided to cross the thin red line, things are also hotting up between Leander Paes and his girlfriend Vicky Lavee.

Although Gaurav and Arti met seven years ago, it was only over the last two years that they began to cosy up. But it took some persuasion before her parents were convinced that Gaurav was the man for their daughter.

Unfortunately, with the wedding, it's going to be curtains for their careers.

While Gaurav has decided to become an administrator — he will promote the game with the Maharashtra Lawn Tennis Association — Arti is still to decide what she's going to do.

For Leander and Vicky, however, it is *The Bodyguard* in the reverse. They met at last year's Canadian Open where Vicky was Leander's security guard. But by the time US Opens came, Leander had made himself responsible for



SANTOSH GHOSH



ASOK CHAKRABORTY

Leander and Vicky (above) and Gaurav and Arti: love-all

her security. *En simple* — armour on-court became l'amour off-court.

Vicky and Leander were together at the launch of the Swiss watch brand Rado at Madras. After vacations in the US, Canada and Australia, the couple's stop-over in India raised a few eyebrows. Is the Paes *khandaan* preparing for a Canadian *bahu*?

Did we hear someone call out 'fault'?



D. P. SINHA

ON THE ROCKS

Bina Ramani, owner of Tamarind Court, the restaurant where model Jessica Lal was murdered, has landed herself in hot waters.

First, Ramani was booked under the Delhi Excise Act for allowing a girl to serve alcohol beyond midnight and that too in a restaurant without a bar licence.

And as anyone who's had a brush with the law knows, once the police get hold of you, they don't want to let you go. During investigations, the police found Ramani had declared herself an Indian while registering her marriage with Canadian George Mailhot. However, according to the records of the Foreigners Regional Registration Office, she is a British passport holder.

So a marriage court has now revoked the certificate of marriage issued to her in April this year. So, to add to her woes, she is now living in sin with Mailhot — at least in the eyes of the law.

Just proves you shouldn't cut corners with the law.



Bina Ramani in troubled waters

Will the Supreme Court directive to introduce cars conforming to Euro norms help contain pollution in Delhi?

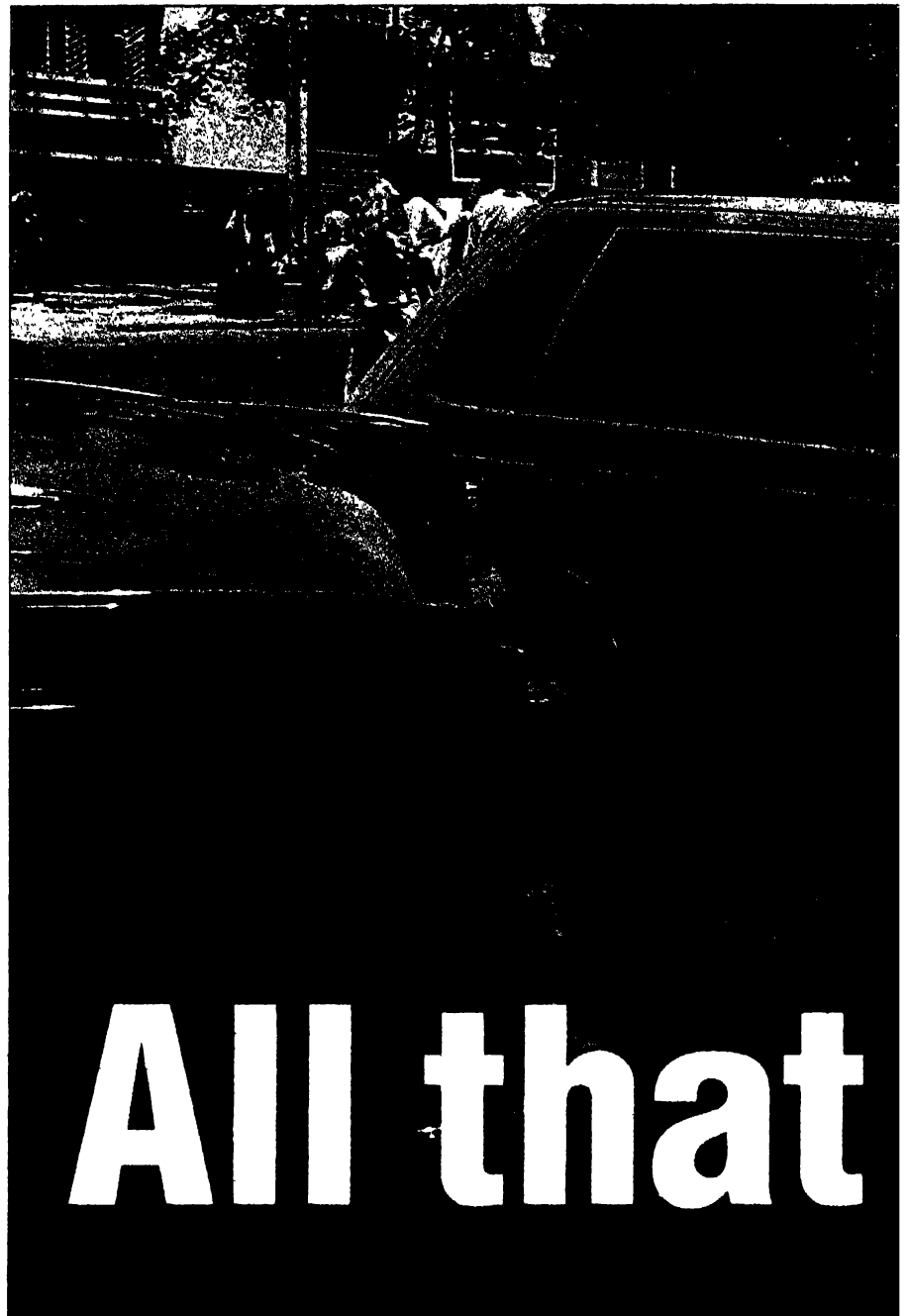
If the Nazis were to inhabit India today, they wouldn't have to invest in gas chambers. Walk down a New Delhi road and there is no escaping the venom, emitted from exhaust pipes. As the Tata Energy Research Institute director, R.K. Pachauri, says: "Air pollution has increased in an alarming way. Delhi's residential areas are not safe any more."

With 3.5 million vehicles, Delhi has more than the total number of cars in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras put together. And the number is growing faster than the city's human population. According to John Popisilik, environmental health advisor at the World Health Organisation, Delhi witnesses 10,000 pollution-related deaths each year. And 70 per cent of the city's pollution is caused by vehicular pollution alone.

The Supreme Court's recent ruling that automobile manufacturers can only sell Euro I compliant cars from 1 June onwards, is a positive step towards controlling the pollution level. From 1 April, 2000 only Euro II compliant cars will hit the roads. Both directives apply only to the National Capital Region (NCR)

Unfortunately, the regulations imposed on new cars touches just the tip of the iceberg, because far more pollution is caused by old cars, trucks, buses and two-wheelers. About 80,000 new cars are sold annually in Delhi, but there are about 700,000 old ones which pollute the air more.

The Supreme Court ruling came almost by default. Centre for Science and Environment, an NGO, had filed a Public Interest Litigation, asking for a ban on non-commercial diesel vehicles. When the council for one of the diesel car manufacturers pointed out that petrol vehicles were also polluting the environment, the judge, quite unexpectedly, gave the ruling, thus preponing the deadlines for meeting the Euro I emission norm. The mandatory registra-



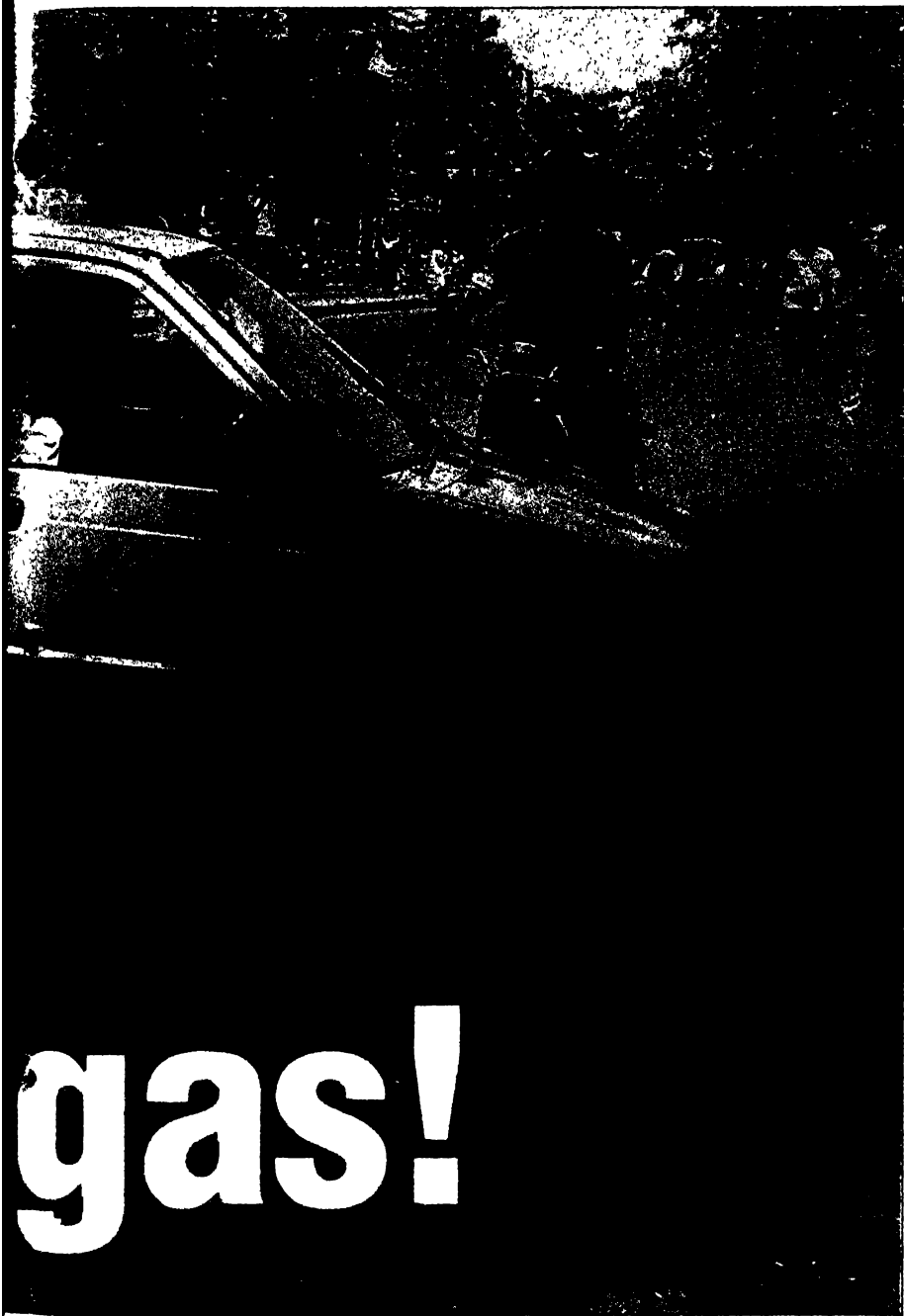
All that

tion of new vehicles in the NCR till 31 May has pushed market leaders like Maruti into a difficult situation. While Euro-compliant car manufacturers are laughing all the way to the bank, Maruti has been cornered. Industry sources allege that it was a move planned to establish the importance of superior technology over the phenomenal brand equity enjoyed by Maruti.

A large section of manufacturers have been taken unawares by the Supreme Court directive. Says P. Balendran, vice-

president, corporate communications, General Motors: "There was no directive for the car manufacturers in India to meet specific emission norms. So we did not require to do so. Now with the Supreme Court's ruling coming into force, we will update the technology of our cars to meet the Euro norms within the stipulated time."

But since the stringent norms are applicable only to the NCR, there are ways of skirting around the crisis. Some car-makers intend to offload their non-



BREATHING SPACE

Expected benefits following the Supreme Court ruling

- Entire Delhi Transport Corporation fleet to run on Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) from 1 March, 2000
- No petrol-driven vehicle will be permitted to convert to diesel
- CNG-driven three-wheelers to be made available on subsidy
- Two-wheelers with four-stroke engines to gradually replace the existing lot
- All taxis to be CNG-driven

fire. Rs 15,000 crore is needed to produce fuel with Euro compliant sulphur level. Officials say sulphur content in diesel is unlikely to go down before ten years due to paucity of resources to alter the refineries. Says Michael P. Walsh, technical consultant, Pollution: "The sulphur levels in diesel should also be brought down from the current rate of 25000 parts per million to 500 parts per million. Even a good engine is ineffective if dirty diesel is used."

In India, the benzene content in petrol hovers somewhere between 3 and 5 per cent, when the international norms allow not more than 1 per cent by volume. And that when benzene is a common indoor air pollutant, known to be carcinogenic to humans

The only possible solution is to tackle the benzene threat at the source. Says Yogendra Sahay, general manager, corporate communications, Indian Oil Cor-

Some car manufacturers intend to offload their non-conforming vehicles to other states. Delhiites may also get such vehicles registered outside the state

conforming vehicles to other states. Hyundai Motors has decided to make available its Euro II compliant Santro across the country for Rs 12,000 extra, while the existing models will be sold in other parts of the country at the original price. Besides, Delhi residents may get their non-conforming vehicles registered outside the state by greasing some palms.

➤ **E**nvironmentalists point out that the adequacy of Euro norms in controll-

ing pollution is suspect. The basic requirement for Euro norms is a multi-point fuel injection system. For Euro II, an electronic control unit to maintain the desirable composition of fuel and air, a catalytic converter with palladium and some additional devices are the key requirements. At present, a catalytic converter will meet the Euro I norms, which will take care of carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxide and hydrocarbon emissions. But that leaves out benzene and sulphur. The quality of diesel has come under

RUPINDER SHARMA

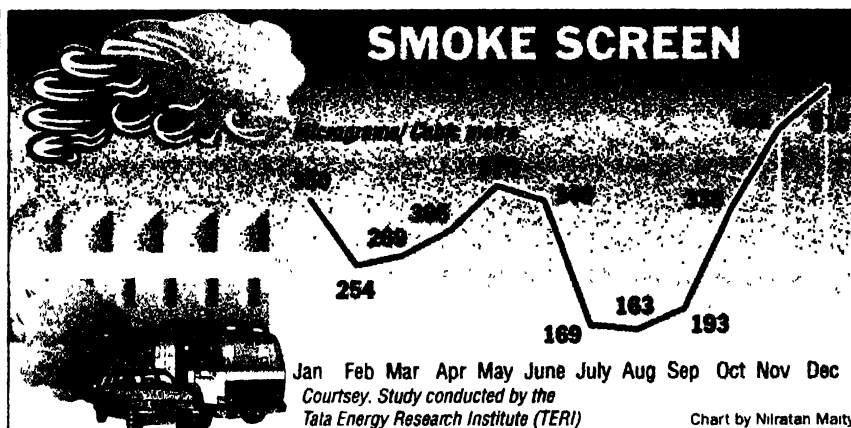
Given the growing population on Delhi's streets, any gain through better engines is bound to be offset by sheer numbers



poration: "We are supplying fuel that is commensurate with the Euro standard specifications. If we are issued a directive we can reduce the content through minor adjustments." Adds S.A. Dutta, scientist, Central Pollution Control Board. "We are trying to arrive at a benzene content of 3 per cent by volume from the year 2000 onwards." It is evident that Delhi residents shall continue to be prone to high levels of benzene both at the dispensing stage at the petrol pumps and through vehicular exhaust

And how does the consumer recognise a Euro compliant vehicle? Says Murad Ali Baig, an automobile consultant. "Indian certification procedure is yet to be determined. So the manufacturers are self-certifying their product." The fact that test conditions vary from the on-road conditions makes it imperative that a strict regulatory authority takes up the task of certification. Ironically, though many laws provide for environmental protection, the enforcement mechanism is weak. The liability of the pollutant has to be assessed while deciding on punitive measures.

Forcing car-makers to graduate to state-of-the-art technology is just one of the options. But given the population explosion on Delhi's streets, any gain through better engines is bound to be offset by sheer numbers. Says Omesh Saragal, chief secretary, Delhi Government: "The public must actively pursue the demands for a public transport system,



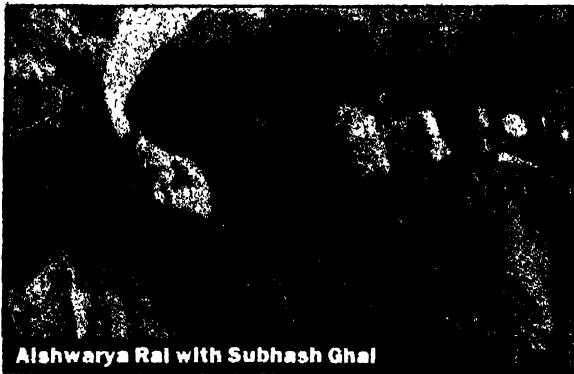
for instance, the mass rapid transport system. Any laid-back attitude will prove detrimental to their interests. Cab-sharing may restrict the numbers of vehicles on the roads, provided offices shift to a central place." Adds Dilip Biswas, chairman, Central Pollution Control Board: "We propose that the emission standards be made more stringent progressively. We have been lagging far behind the West. By 2005, our endeavour will be to adopt Euro III to bridge this gap."

Interestingly, the European Union will adopt Euro III at the turn of the millennium. Which should inspire more people to conform to tighter emission standards, advanced engine technology and regularly conduct routine inspections. Says S.D. Awasthi, managing director, Daewoo Motors: "The con-

sumer's psyche accepts the importance of technology today. He realises it is not a gimmick." "But if India wants to imbibe cleaner technologies to match the emission standards of the West, standard fuel quality has to go," adds B.V.R. Subbu, director, marketing, Hyundai Motors India Ltd.

The arguments are many. So are cars and their standards. The buck gets passed from the manufacturers to the fuel suppliers who pass it on to the government that issues the directives. One hopes that polluting vehicles are not passed around in the same manner to other states. After all, the capital managing to breathe freely wouldn't make sense if it happens at the expense of the rest of the nation choking. •

Devdatta Das/New Delhi



Aishwarya Rai with Subhash Ghai

HE'S GOT RHYTHM

Click the mouse if you want an update on Subhash Ghai's Taal

It took a Subhash Ghai — the Bollywood director who has his fingers on the viewers' pulse — to think of it. For an industry known for 'improvisations' and gimmickry of every kind to catch the viewers' attention, this came in pretty late.

Particularly, in times when nothing seems to work without getting a certain .com appendage; Ghai seems to have finally arrived.

The director of mega-hits such as *Hero*, *Ram Laxhan* and *Pardes* will have the music and detailed information of his latest project *Taal* on the Internet shortly.

Last month C2C Online, a division of Perfect Relations and the first Internet communication company of its kind in India, announced the launch of *Taal's* music on the Net. "The Internet as a medium has the ability to reach millions of Hindi movie fans all over the world," said Subhash Ghai, the managing director of Mukta Arts. "We at Mukta Arts want to ensure that the music of *Taal* is accessible in real time," he added.

For cinema-lovers this is good news. Particularly those who sit through zillions of sneak previews of music videos on MTV and Channel V and yet can't seem to get enough of it.

For the filmi types, Internet has opened new vistas. The trendy and the happening can now get hooked on to their computers rather than sit in front of the idiot box all day long.

And if you think you will miss out on the thrill of surfing, just like the idiot box this one offers 'variety' too. There are three sites to choose from: www.subhashghai.com/taal, www.tipsmusicfilms.com and www.perfectrelations.org.

This is not the first time, however, that such a site has been created on the Web. *Dil Se* (best remembered for the foot-tapping *Chhaiya Chhaiya* number) was on it quite sometime back. Another

new release, *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam*, is also on the Net.

So what is so special about *Taal*?

Typically, like most other things by Ghai, this too is a mega-affair. The website was launched after a formal inauguration with due fanfare and followed by a press conference. "That's one reason why the other films launched on the Net went unnoticed," explains Sandeep Coushik of C2C Online. "Besides, this is different because on this site we will have online interviews with the stars of the film. A virtual press conference with the stars is on the cards."

Ghai has assembled quite a star cast in the film. Aishwarya Rai, Akshaye Khanna and Anil Kapoor form the triangle in this 'musical' love story. The music has been composed by A.R. Rahman, who again commands a huge fan following.

The movie will be released in early August this year.

A site on the Net is a regular thing abroad, although the fad is still to catch on in India. The C2C team in Bangalore — the communications part is being looked after by the Bangalore office — is very hopeful of a good response. And to pep it up a little, quizzes and other competitions form part of the package, with lucrative prizes to be won.

"We at C2C Online are excited at the prospect of promoting *Taal* on the Net," says Dilip Cherian, consulting partner, Perfect Relations. "This initiative will open new vistas for Bollywood onto the global arena at a fraction of their international promotional costs," he adds.

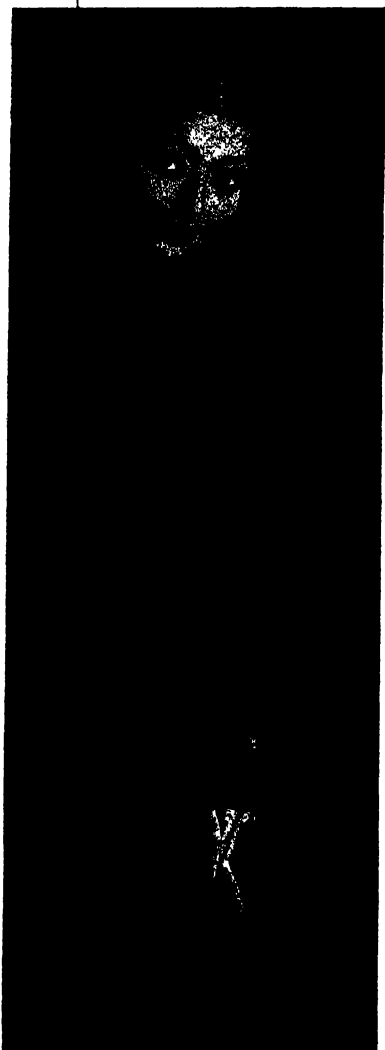
For the computer-literate, *Taal* is just a few clicks away. As for Subhash Ghai, just one click at the box office will do. •

Anuja Joshi/Bangalore



Online interviews with...

competitions... prizes...

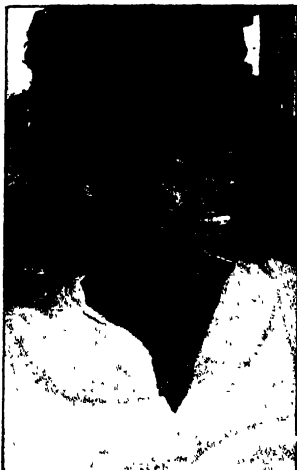


AISHWARYA RAI

Maybe all those rumours about Aishwarya Rai and Salman Khan aren't entirely baseless after all. Consider the evidence. First, Aishwarya Rai organises a surprise birthday party for Salman in Somy's absence (she's still sulking in America, because Salman won't marry her). Then, the former Miss World puts in an appearance on a *Rendezvous with Simi Garewal*. And when she's asked whom she considered sexy and attractive, Ash says — straight off the bat — Salman Khan. Now, if that isn't telling what is?

Now we know. David Dhawan just doesn't cut it unless he has Govinda on the other side of the camera.

You only have to watch *Biwi No. 1* to realise that a David Dhawan laugh-a-minute fun riot is more like a sick joke when Salman



DAVID DHAWAN

Khan and Anil Kapoor are standing in for Govinda (and the less we say about saccharine-sweet Karisma Kapoor, the better).

If Dhawan has any sense (though evidence on that score is sadly lacking) he will get Govinda back in the picture — and double quick!

So, it's happened again. Yes, Pooja Bhatt has ditched yet another boyfriend

after swearing eternal love to him. Given that the man — using the term very loosely indeed — in question is television anchor and bit actor, Aly Khan, you can't really blame her. But to lose a couple of boyfriends is one thing, to break up with every man you've ever gone out with begins to look like carelessness.

So, what is with the Bhatt



RANI MUKHERJEE

If Rani Mukherjee is really serious about taking over Kajol's crown, then the first thing she should do is go on a crash diet. Those hefty biceps she sports in the Hero Cycle ad don't do anything for her looks —

and certainly won't do much good to her career.

So it's sprouts and butter-milk now for Rani — and some serious working out in the gym as well — if she wants to remain in the number one stakes. Or else, it's going to be Karisma Kapoor all the way.

babe? Has she just had damnably bad luck? Or is it that she is incapable of sustaining a long-term relationship.

The jury is still out on that

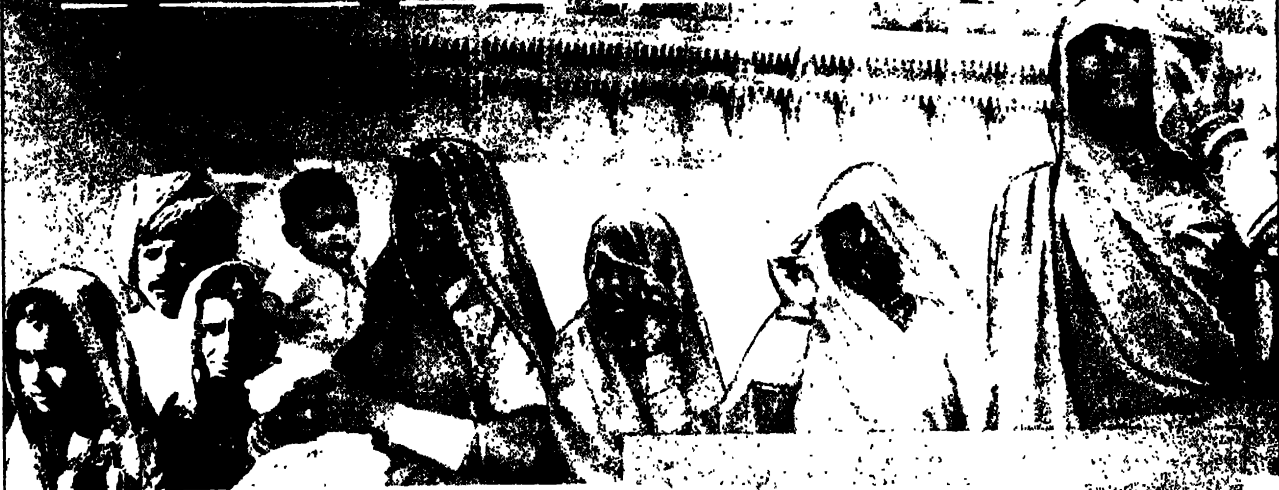
one. And we suspect the verdict won't be in until Pooja's next boyfriend surfaces — and then disappears again. •

POOJA BHATT



HZL-

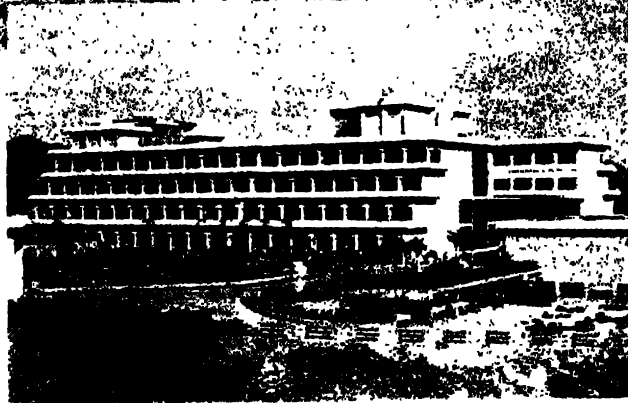
A RICH LIFE BEYOND ZINC



As a responsible corporate citizen committed to look beyond Zinc into ecological and environmental concerns, HZL remains ever-active.

Installation of appropriate pollution control and environment monitoring systems through dust extraction plants, tailing ponds for solid waste disposal and waste water reclamation, represent meaningful thrusts in the right direction.

At another level, attempting to improve the quality of life for the backward and tribal populace with a host of welfare schemes like rural health programmes, family welfare



activities, adult education programmes, water supply etc.— are on-going activities at HZL.

Thus, India's market leader in Zinc— HZL continues to set new examples in its environmental & social aspects, for others to follow.



HINDUSTAN ZINC LIMITED

The nature of alliances will determine the poll prospects in the south

The importance of alliances in a multipolar situation lies in the fact that parties with a limited base may strike rich dividends by forging the right electoral pact. Similarly, parties might fail to win a single seat despite having a significant base if they opted to contest on their own.

This has been the case in several states where the Bharatiya Janata Party forged alliances in the 1998 elections. While the party's upswing in fortunes in Bihar, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Maharashtra are well known, the situation in Karnataka has been more dramatic.

While it had never won a Lok Sabha seat in the state till as late as 1991, the BJP won nearly half the 28 seats, primarily because of enlisting the support of

tion of pre-eminence.

SUNDAY profiles the remaining battlegrounds in southern India in the last part of the series.

Karnataka

Basic facts

The 1998 election

☛ The BJP-Lok Shakti alliance bagged 16 seats while the Congress won nine. The Janata Dal that had won 16 seats in 1996 managed to win only three and its vote share fell from 34.91 to 21.69 per cent. In contrast, Lok Shakti, a new elec-

Braced fortunes

Lok Shakti, the breakaway faction of the state Janata Dal.

Though a minor party in the alliance, the role of the group headed by Ramakrishna Hegde was immense, considering that this quantum leap in the BJP's share of seats was not accompanied by the growth of its base. In fact, its vote share slipped marginally from its 'peak' performance of 1991.

If Karnataka presents an instance of the benefits of an election, the situation in Andhra Pradesh makes a strong case for the BJP to abandon its policy of going it alone in the state. The time has come for the party to forge an alliance with the Telugu Desam Party. Even a compromise on the vexing question of seat sharing would be worth for the party.

The near-total eclipse of other parties that were once allies of the TDP has led to a situation where the TDP is also in need of allies if it wishes to retain its posi-

total horse, won three seats and polled 11.5 per cent.

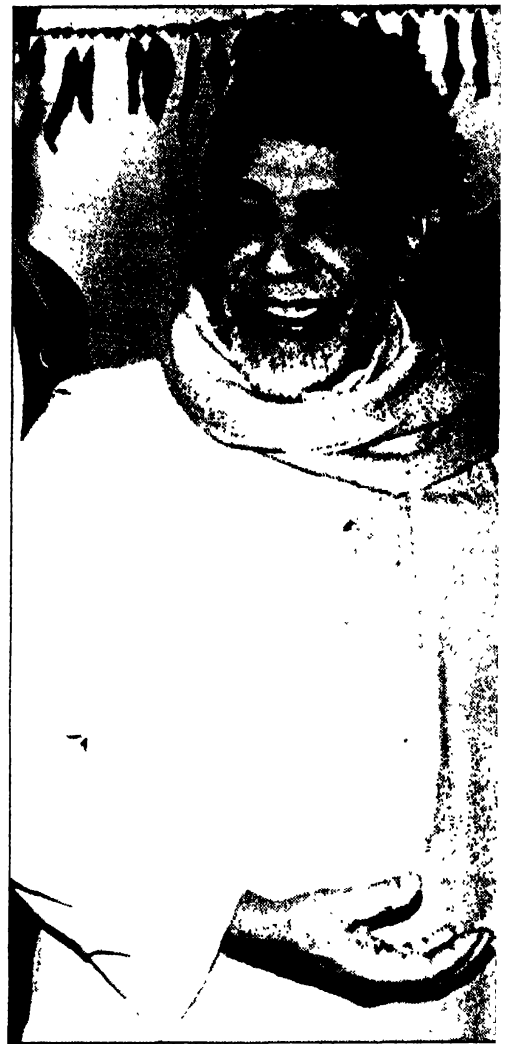
☛ The BJP managed to increase its vote only marginally from 24.61 to 26.95 per cent.

☛ The Congress improved upon its 1996 tally of five seats and increased its vote share from 30.29 to 36.22 per cent.

The 1999 election

☛ With simultaneous Assembly elections likely, the battle will be formidable as the BJP-LS combine will try to expand its base.

☛ The JD faces the prospect of marginalisation in a three-horse race as the people see the contest to be essentially between the Congress and the BJP-LS.



☛ The BJP has to make up its mind whether it wants to remain as the 'elder brother' in state politics and in the process jeopardise its alliance with the LS.

North Kanara

One constituency where the BJP-LS alliance backfired in 1998 was Chitradurga. With 19.8 per cent Scheduled Caste and nine per cent Muslim vote, JD had won this predominantly rural seat in 1996 but the winning candidate crossed over to the LS and was fielded by the alliance.

In 1996, the BJP had fielded its own candidate polling an impressive 27 per cent vote. By elementary arithmetic, the LS candidate should have won in 1998 as in 1996 he polled 35.7 per cent of the vote while the Congress candidate had polled 32.9 per cent.



Ramakrishna Hegde with Atal Behari Vajpayee: splinter power

However, all calculations went haywire. The Congress wrested the seat by nearly 60,000 votes, while the JD polled 20.63 per cent vote, queering the pitch further for the LS candidate. It is thus evident that the BJP-LS alliance had not been able to work out the logistics of the seat.

This time, the two parties should first analyse what went wrong last time and also iron out the differences between the local units of the two parties. The Congress, on its part, is in the driver's seat as further erosion in the JD base would only add to its coffers.

Coastal Karnataka

If one asks where Janardhan Poojary is now, few would be able to say that he has been smarting from three successive

defeats in Mangalore. The one-time Congress front-runner, he has been humbled by V. Dhananjaya Kumar since 1991 when the BJP opened its account in the state.

Though a Congress bastion since the constituency was carved out in 1957, the Jana Sangh had more than a toehold that slowly turned into the BJP's vote-bank. Atal Behari Vajpayee had launched the party's campaign in 1991 with a pledge that Mangalore will open the gateway to the south for the party and since then there has been no looking back for the party here. If the Congress manages to turn the tables, the party will have reasons to be upbeat.

Kanara in south Karnataka was another seat where a Congress heavyweight — Margaret Alva — had to bite the dust in 1998. The victor last time was BJP leader Anant Kumar Hegde, who retained the seat he first won in 1996. The alli-

ance between the BJP and the LS was a resounding success as the BJP polled 50.74 per cent of the vote.

In comparison, the JD's base was practically wiped out and its vote share fell from 34.2 per cent in 1996 to 5.18 per cent in 1998. This was the prime reason for Alva's humiliating defeat by more than 18 per cent of the votes polled. It would be interesting to see whether Alva contests from this constituency.

Andhra Pradesh

Basic facts

The 1998 election

✶ With 22 seats in its kitty, the Congress repeated its 1996 performance both in terms of seats and votes.

✶ The TDP's vote share fell marginally from the 1996 mark of 32.4 per cent but its seats went down from 16 to 12.

✶ The BJP, by forging an alliance with the Lakshmi Parvathi faction of the TDP, increased its tally more than four times and won four seats in the bargain. Its vote share stood at 18.3 per cent, nearly twice the vote it polled during the 'Ram wave' in 1991 when it opened its account by bagging Secunderabad.

✶ The BJP's gain was primarily at the expense of its alliance partner and the one-time allies of the TDP.

✶ Parties like the CPI and AIMIM of Salahuddin Owaisi have their areas of strength and the side that they choose to be on will determine the outcome.

The 1999 election

✶ With Assembly elections likely to be held simultaneously, it has become imperative for the TDP to strike an alliance with the BJP as any other party — especially third front constituents — can do precious little.

✶ The Congress appears to have the initial advantage as the TDP will be handi-

capped by the anti-incumbency factor. Moreover, its performance in 1998 in terms of votes was at its lowest in the past ten years despite which the party won 22 seats.

Coastal Andhra

A TDP stronghold where the BJP has also made impressive gains in recent years. Key constituencies that are likely to determine electoral behaviour are the urban seat of Visakhapatnam and the rural constituency of Rajahmundry.

Visakhapatnam has also been in the news in the past decade for determining the political fortunes of the erstwhile royal family. In 1989, Uma Gajapati Raju contested on a Congress ticket and wrested the seat from the TDP. She, however, failed to retain the seat in 1991.

A few years and a marital estrangement later, she quit politics and left the seat for former husband Ananda Gajapati Raju, who contested on a TDP ticket and lost by a slender margin. He entered the fray again in 1998. That was more tricky than 1996 as the BJP fielded a strong candidate who had a good base on account of being the former mayor of the city.

Last time, the contest was triangular. The BJP polled nearly two lakh votes and was the principal reason behind Raju's second successive defeat. This time it will depend on the alliance — or its absence — between the BJP and the TDP and to whom the seat is allocated. Coastal Andhra is anyway the region where the TDP and the BJP stand to gain most if they reach an understanding.

Rajahmundry is the seat where the BJP made unexpected gains in 1998 because it polled just 3.9 per cent of the vote despite the 'Ram wave' in 1991 and as a result did not field a candidate in 1996.

In 1998, BJP candidate G.V.S. Naidu won by nearly 10,000 votes, with the Congress coming third. The seat is important as during elections, a good showing by the Congress would indicate that things are pretty rosy for the party in most parts of the state.

Rayalaseema

A traditional Congress bastion where the BJP has made little impact, this reg-

ion is likely to see some of the Congress heavyweights. Among the principal Congress winners in 1998 were Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy and Vijaya Bhaskara Reddy. While the former won from Cuddapah, the latter bagged Kurnool.

In both the seats, the BJP had fielded candidates but failed to bag more than



It is difficult to say whether former chief minister and Congress leader K. Karunakaran would try to retain the seat because of his slender margin of victory last time

four per cent vote. Whatever the alliance in the state, this region is likely to witness a two-horse race and the choice of candidates along with caste composition will play an important role as the dominant community here are the Reddys.

Telengana

Another Congress bastion. Last time, in

the Mahabubnagar seat, the TDP supported Jaipal Reddy of the Janata Dal, who returned to the constituency following an unsuccessful attempt in 1989. The BJP has polled a credible number of votes since 1991 when it got 21.1 per cent.

In fact, since elections in 1991, the contest has essentially been three-cornered with the BJP cutting into the anti-Congress vote, thereby damaging TDP's prospects. Reddy, however, will have a tough contest on hand if the TDP alliance with the BJP becomes a reality. In that case, the seat is likely to go to the BJP and its candidate would be a formidable rival for even the Congress.

Kerala

Basic facts

The 1998 election

☛ Kerala remained bipolar with the 20 seats shared evenly by the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) and the CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) in 1996. This time, however, the UDF won an extra seat over the rival camp.

☛ The vote share of the Congress and the CPI(M) — the major constituents of the two fronts — remained more or less at the 1996 level of 38 per cent and 21 per cent respectively. However, the BJP vote swelled to an impressive 8.02 per cent giving credence to the claims of its leaders that the party was able to swing the balance in the state.

The 1999 Election

☛ This election is likely to continue the trend of marginal swings causing changes in fortunes of the two fronts.

The BJP would hope to capitalise on the 'collaboration' between the Congress and the Left in toppling its government. Its campaign plank would be that there is little difference between the two fronts when it comes to governing at the Centre and only the BJP is in a position to provide an alternative.

Kasaragod

At the northern tip of Kerala, it is one of

the constituencies where the BJP expects to make a mark. One of the few seats where the Jana Sangh had a significant presence from the Sixties, the BJP candidate polled more than one lakh votes in 1998. The CPI(M) candidate, T. Govindan, retained the seat but with a reduced margin.

Though the seat has been won by the LDF for four consecutive times since 1989, it cannot rest on its laurels as the BJP is always threatening to emerge as its main contender.

The constituency has a significant Muslim voter presence of 27 per cent

Chennithala.

Kurup won by less than 6,000 votes and if one considers that the BJP candidate polled nearly 43,000 votes, one can comprehend the extent to which the party determines winners and losers in Kerala.

Thiruvananthapuram

Being the state capital and at the southern tip of the state, it is another key constituency. It is difficult to say whether former chief minister and Congress

seats, the notable feature was the emergence of the BJP as the main contender to the Congress. The party polled a high 30.04 per cent of the votes, just a shade less than the Congress's share of 31.59 per cent. The BJP vote went up by more than 16 per cent from 13.75 per cent in 1996.

✶ In Panaji, the BJP pushed the Maharashtra Gomantak Party — former Union minister Ramakant Khalap was the candidate — to the third spot and in Mormugao, it came second to the United Goan Democratic Party, that has a good base among the Catholics.

The 1999 election

✶ The Assembly elections have proved that the BJP's performance in 1998 was not a flash in the pan and the regional parties will have to forge an alliance if the Congress is to be defeated.

✶ If the BJP wishes to have an electoral adjustment, it shall also have to decide whether the party should ally with the MGP or the UGDP. The choice of seat would depend on its alliance partner.

If the tie-up were with the MGP, the BJP is likely to field its candidate from Mormugao and if the alliance is with the UGDP, it would contest from Panaji. The Congress, on its part, is likely to contest both the seats on its own.

Andaman & Nicobar Islands

This is one seat that is likely to witness a contest as the verdict was sealed by a margin of just 544 votes. Though the long-standing MP, Manoranjan Bhakta, retained his seat once again, Bishnu Pada Ray of the BJP, gave him a good scare before bowing out.

There is also trouble brewing for Bhakta from within his party as last time a rebel contested on a Congress(S) ticket and this time with Sharad Pawar in a mood to defeat the Congress first and then train his guns at the BJP, the island seat can no longer be counted as a sure seat. •

Manoranjan Mukhopadhyay/Bangalore, Hyderabad, Thiruvananthapuram, Panaji and Port Blair



Jaipal Reddy of the Janata Dal will have a tough contest on hand if the TDP's alliance with the BJP becomes a reality. In that case, the seat is likely to go to the BJP

and the BJP has been trying to consolidate the Hindu vote. If the party ever wins a seat in the state, Kasaragod is the likely one.

Kottayam

The constituency in central Kerala might be home to some of the finest backwaters in the state but it seldom takes a back seat. This was the lone seat that enabled the LDF to retain its toehold in 1984 when Suresh Kurup won it.

It witnessed a fiery contest in 1998 between Kurup — who returned here after trying his luck unsuccessfully in 1991 against P.J. Kurien — and former Youth Congress leader Ramesh

leader K. Karunakaran, would try to retain the seat. This is because of his slender margin of victory last time and also because the BJP got 12.39 per cent of the votes.

Moreover, the BJP is likely to repeat its candidate—a member of the erstwhile royal family of Travancore—and thereby cash in on his personal clout. On behalf of the LDF, the seat was won comfortably by the CPI in 1996.

Goa

Basic facts

The 1998 election

✶ Though the Congress won both the

"Bofors is a malic

Congress leader Pranab Mukherjee talks about Kargil, the revolt and the coming elections

INTERVIEWED BY ARINDAM SARKAR/CALCUTTA

Congress Working Committee member, Congress member of the Rajya Sabha and former Union minister Pranab Mukherjee has been in the thick of activities in the last three months. Recently, he visited Calcutta to launch a video cassette by Gandhi Vichar Mancha on the Congress's 1999 electoral campaign. During his overnight stay in the city, he spoke to SUNDAY on a wide array of issues. Excerpts:

SUNDAY: The Congress's victory in the Goa Assembly polls is a shot in the arm...

Pranab Mukherjee: Yes. I find two major implications. First, many regional parties have been rejected by the Goan electorate. The Congress's majority and the BJP's second position proves that the voters are in favour of the national parties — and not the smaller outfits.

Secondly, the propaganda against Mrs Sonia Gandhi and the revolt of Sharad Pawar and Co. have not affected the Congress. The electorate, by reposing their confidence in the Congress, have clearly demonstrated that neither the foreign origin of Sonia Gandhi nor the revolt of Pawar would have any impact on the Congress's vote-bank.

Q: But on many national issues, the Congress is appearing to be a defunct Opposition. It's failing to capitalise on the mistakes committed by the BJP government. Why?

A: We have never refrained from criticising the BJP government, especially their failures. But at this moment, we are not talking about the BJP's failures because our brave *jawans* are fighting to free our land from Pakistani intruders. We believe the unity of India should be preserved in view of broader and larger national interests, even though we don't agree with the way the government has handled the Kargil situation.

Q: But there is a general perception that the Congress is suffering from a leadership crisis...

A: No. Under the leadership of Sonia Gandhi the Congress has been reinvigorated. Her authority has been accepted by all Congress workers. The way they demonstrated their loyalty and solidarity with Sonia when she decided to step down from the Congress presidency, and the manner in which they urged her to take up the mantle, showed that she is the real leader of the Congress.

Q: The Kargil crisis has affected peace and diplomatic relations with Pakistan. But the Congress seems to be unconcerned.



A: No, not at all. We're criticising Pakistan for its aggressive role; for its connivance with the ISI; and for patronising and encouraging the infiltrators. And, of course, we have our own problems. But as I said, we're not highlighting the failures of the BJP government for obvious reasons. And I'm sure the electorate will appreciate that.

Q: Are you apprehensive that Congress's criticism would alienate the voters and that the BJP might rake up the ghost of Bofors?

A: On the Bofors issue, we have told umpteenth number of times that let the truth come out. But what have they brought out? Tell me? A lot of sound was made by the United Front government. The Prime Minister went on record that all documents will be placed on the floor of the House. And in the Rajya Sabha, when I raised the issue, they backtracked.

It's nonsense to say that we're scared of Bofors. It's a mali-

tous propaganda"

"On the Bofors issue, we have told umpteenth number of times that let the truth come out. But what have they brought out? Tell me? A lot of sound was made by the United Front government too. But when I raised the issue in the Rajya Sabha, they backtracked"



cious propaganda going on for the last 10 to 12 years. But where's the truth?

Q: Is the Congress still reeling under the impact of Sharad Pawar's revolt?

A: No. The leaving of Pawar and others have had a marginal impact. There could be some effect on the Congress's Maharashtra votebank, but nowhere else. In the past, too, Maharashtra leaders have left the party, but the workers have always remained with the Congress.

You see, these three (Pawar, P.A. Sangma and Tariq Anwar) have different viewpoints. Sangma suddenly started feeling that he would be the prime ministerial nominee of Sonia Gandhi and he started drumming that. Look, there's no harm in being ambitious but one should not ignore the reality. So far as Anwar is concerned, he felt that he was being marginalised after he was removed from the office of the general

secretary. But in any organisation such shifts do take place, one cannot remain in office for eternity. So he should have taken it in that spirit. As for Mr Pawar, to remain in a political party is not his trademark. After all, consistency is not the virtue of Mr Pawar. Earlier too he had left the Congress. He had also left his own mentors like Vasantdada Patil and Y.B. Chavan. Perhaps, Pawar too thought that with Sonia Gandhi around, he has no chance of becoming the PM. Actually, individual ambitions of these leaders forced them to revolt. There was no political reason.

Q: Was the Congress high command aware of the growing disenchantment within the party?

A: We were surprised, because the 'foreign origin' issue had been discussed earlier. During the Delhi, MP and Rajasthan elections it had been debated upon and rejected. But that didn't seem to have had any influence on these men. Moreover, Pawar and Sangma were deeply involved in organisational matters. Pawar was almost in all committees and was the Leader of the Opposition during the April confidence motion. So I don't know why they raked up the foreigner issue.

We had discussed the issue threadbare in the CWC. It was unanimously decided to keep aside this matter. At their insistence, we called a CWC meeting again on 17 and 20 May, but all three gave lame excuses and did not show up. And the CWC, again, by a majority vote rejected their allegations.

Q: Looking back, it seems the Congress brought the BJP government down without doing its homework. Where did the calculation go wrong?

A: If you start with the presumption that the Congress wanted to form the government then that's wrong. Our position was very clear: we would play no role unless the government collapsed on its own. And only after that would the Congress discharge constitutional responsibility: to either accept the dissolution of Lok Sabha or to try to form the government.

We didn't want premature dissolution of Lok Sabha so we wanted to form the government. And we made it abundantly clear to all parties (non-BJP and the Left) that only the Congress would form the government. Under no circumstances, we wanted a coalition government. But since we didn't have the required numbers we would have to depend on outside support. There was no question of being power hungry. We wanted to give an alternative government only to avoid elections.

Q: But with the BJP caretaker government in power in the run-up to the polls, the Congress has more problems in its hands...

A: In 1977, we were defeated when we were in office; in 1989 we were defeated when we were in office; and in 1996 too we were defeated when we were in office. It was only in 1998 that we suffered defeat when we were in the Opposition. We don't believe that remaining in office gives an additional advantage.

Q: After the Assembly results last year, the Congress start-



"We are not going to the polls without a PM candidate. We will ask for votes in the name of Sonia Gandhi, she will be our main campaigner and she will be projected as our leader. So there cannot be any confusion in the minds of the voters"

ed drifting. It failed to prevent the BJP from forming a caretaker government. And then came the split...

A: We have maintained one position ever since Sonia Gandhi became the president of the Congress. That we would be a constructive Opposition. We will not join the game of toppling the BJP government. If the BJP government collapsed because of its inherent contradictions, only then would we discharge our constitutional responsibility. So there is no question of drifting.

We were prepared to sit in the Opposition benches to oppose and expose the government. Moreover, how can you say that the Congress has been split? Does the leaving of a few Congressmen affect a monolithic party? The strength of the Congress leadership emanates from the support of the rank and file, and that was amply demonstrated last month for Sonia Gandhi.

Q: Pawar, Anwar and Sangma have alleged that Sonia Gandhi is being led and misled by a coterie...

A: Look, such allegations are old in the Congress. There have been leaders who have said so. If they are in the coterie themselves then there is no problems. But once they are out of it, then the sky falls on their head. In the Congress, major decisions are taken by the CWC. The Congress president more than often consults the working committee, members discuss the issue and thereafter come to a conclusion. The Congress president also has full authority to deploy different persons to carry out different tasks. Take for instance Mr Sangma: he was not a member of the CWC at that point of time, but he was appointed the chairman of the task force. Many senior leaders were asked to serve under his chairmanship. Therefore, how can they say that Sonia Gandhi is surrounded by a coterie?

Q: In the coming polls, the BJP will raise the issue of Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin. Will this harm the Congress's prospects?

A: I don't think this will harm us. Because the BJP has already raised and drummed up the issue. The point which is being emphasised is that no foreigner can become the PM of India. But it is for the people of India to decide that. To become PM, the minimum qualification required is to enjoy the confidence of the majority of Lok Sabha members. And to enjoy that you have to be an Indian citizen, an Indian voter and also a member of Parliament. So let the people decide. How can you bring an external factor to stand in the way of the leadership issue? I feel the Indian electorate is clever enough to understand the truth.

Q: But the Congress has decided to go to the polls without projecting a PM candidate...

A: It's not true that we won't project a PM candidate. Immediately after the election campaign starts, we will project Sonia Gandhi as our prime ministerial candidate.

Q: For a 114-year-old party, isn't it a shame that it's dithering to name its PM candidate?

A: Look, we are not going to the polls without a PM candidate. We will ask for votes in the name of Sonia Gandhi, she will be our main campaigner and she will be projected as our leader. So there cannot be any confusion in the minds of the voters.

Q: Till now, the Congress has no poll issues.

A: Who said? We have very positive poll issues. We want to tell the people that if you want to avoid frequent elections, if you want to have a stable political executive in this country and expect them to complete the full five-year term, then it's your responsibility to vote for the Congress which has a track record of providing stability.

We will also highlight the inefficiency of the BJP coalition. How the BJP government has completely messed up in all spheres. It has been a roll-back government. The nuclear explosion is not a 40-day wonder, things were already in place and the government just exploded the bombs. That the price rise has been inhuman; the bus ride was a fiasco; the imposition of President's Rule in Bihar was atrocious; and their legislative practices have also been appalling.

Finally, we will point out how fragile the concept of coalition politics is in this country and how no coalition has worked here. We are going to tell the voters to compare the track records of the Congress in office and the non-Congress parties in power and then decide. •

Picture perfect

The electronic media scored over print in covering World Cup cricket



Doordarshan has really got itself into a mess, hasn't it, over the World Cup? Stracon and Nimbus in the messy last-minute race, DD making accusations against all and sundry

and in turn being accused by the ministry of information and broadcasting. To cricket fans, it sounded like a classic case of bungling and too little too late. Yes, we got the matches (only the ones with India participating) on DD, with Hindi commentary via others. Not on DD's much-publicised Sports Channel but here, there and everywhere. And have you seen the quality? Every time I switch over from ESPN or STAR Sports to DD's relays, I have to fiddle with the colour, adjust the sound, and generally find it so poor technically that in spite of all my patriotism, I go back, thankfully, to the satellite channels. There they have a formidable line-up of what the blurbs describe as the First Eleven, the commentators — the ever-popular Geoff Boycott (more Indian than the Indians), Rameez Raja, Sunil Gavaskar, Tony Greig, Michael Holding and even Ravi Shastri, who vanished momentarily but made a brief appearance during the classic Sri Lanka-India match where Sourav and Rahul covered us with glory. And Sachin's upward glance when he made a century against Kenya and dedicated it to his late father. A touching moment.

What cricket needs occasionally is an off-beat story because everyone has to report the same facts in different languages and styles. Some of our print sports reporters have really gone over the top with their ornate language (John Arlott and A.F.S Talyarkhan did it so much better) when the icing was not really needed on the cake. While the cricket professionals who covered matches in the media enlivened things with their personal reminiscences and occasional good-natured digs at each other, there seemed to be too many reporters in most papers,



The line-up of star commentators on satellite channels: (clockwise from top left) Tony Greig, Michael Holding, Sunil Gavaskar, Geoff Boycott, Rameez Raja and Ravi Shastri

crowding the pages without either variety or imagination. Here it was the electronic media which scored, not least of all with its immediacy.

While ads are a necessity and ESPN and STAR Sports are a little more careful than DD about making ads more important than cricket or tennis, I did occasionally catch these two normally-careful channels barging into the opening balls of an over. I also found the plethora of patriotic ads a little embarrassing during India's earlier matches, when the country was seething with anger over the way they threw away matches. There is such a thing as overkill, although some of the ads, such as Shah Rukh Khan barging into the dressing room masquerading as Sachin, were quite funny. But the best off-beat story was on STAR News — a conversation with Sourav Ganguly's bat-supplier in Calcutta, whom Monidipa Bannerji and Indranil Choudhury persuaded to

explain Sourav's preferences in wood, grain, weight and everything else about his bat. The affection with which the bat-suppliers spoke and the elaborate details of their craft, which were shown in close-up, not to speak of how they got the bat to London, all added up to a great human interest story. Because it appealed to both cricket fans and the lay public. It was certainly the day of the Prince of Calcutta.

Yes of course, there was plenty of heroic action from different teams and failure and heart-break. But if you ask me which team had my sneaking sympathy and admiration, it was the Bangladesh team. It needed a lot of guts to stand up to the giants and the courage and cheerfulness with which they faced certain defeat was truly heroic. And their victory over Scotland, the same size in cricket terms, provided as carefree cricket as carefree watching. And much-needed light relief. •

The shadow

Twelve years after it first surfaced, the Bofors scandal still looms large over the prospects of the Congress and Sonia

On 16 April, 1987, the news section, Ekoredaktionen, of the Swedish National Radio, in its broadcast made a stunning revelation. In a despatch by their Hong Kong-based correspondent, the Radio alleged that the Swedish arms firm, Bofors, earned its biggest arms export order by paying bribes to senior Indian politicians and key figures of the defence establishment. These allegations stunned the nation and left Mr Clean of Indian politics, Rajiv Gandhi, devastated and tainted, and his Congress party a confused conglomerate of competing interests.

The Swedish broadcast was followed by an aggressive newspaper campaign that blew holes in the government's defence. A Madras-based daily, *The*



SANTOSH DUTTA



Sonia Gandhi's interactions with former Prime Minister Narasimha Rao were always traced back to her anxiety to ensure that the Bofors probe was capped

Hindu, cast off its conservative garb and came out with an explosive expose about the middlemen who had allegedly benefited the public servants instrumental in clinching the Bofors gun deal. The scandal also became the reason for bringing together disparate political parties that finally brought down Rajiv Gandhi and his Congress.

Twelve years after the sensational broadcast by the Swedish Radio, neither the Congress — the party of India's freedom struggle — nor its leadership has been able to exorcise the ghost of Bofors. Even Rajiv, who fell to a human bomb on 21 May, 1991, after his death could not distance himself from the accusations of favouritism and corruption that jogged him in the last four years of his life. Even though the truth is still

of the gun



The Bofors scandal brought together disparate political parties who worked towards the undoing of Rajiv Gandhi's government



shrouded in mystery about the final beneficiaries of the corruption scandal, Bofors, in the Indian political lexicon, became synonymous with corruption in high places.

Since Bofors defined the 1989 elections and politically devastated the Congress, there has not been a single election on which the dark shadow of Bofors case has not fallen. So debilitating is its impact on the Congress and especially the family of Rajiv Gandhi that every action or move is linked with Bofors. Even when Rajiv's Italian-born widow, Sonia, was in mourning, her interaction with the then Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao was always traced back to her anxiety to ensure that the Bofors probe was capped. The situation now is a little different, after the mantle to lead a brit-

tle Congress fell on her. Her aggressive exertions to bring down the government of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and then form her own government too was linked with the impending arrival of the Bofors documents from the Swiss Banks. Sonia, who has taken pains to show that her family has been a victim of this slanderous campaign — as she lost her husband after an avalanche of accusations had sullied his reputation — has even called Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee a 'liar'.

The new generation brought up on a heavy dose of financial scandals is likely to be intrigued by the undue importance given to the Bofors gun deal when the total amount of kickbacks was merely Rs 64 crore. But Bofors bribery scandal was not a heist performed by some stock

market bandicoot. It was probably the first scam where the Prime Minister and his close associates were charged with accepting bribes in a defence deal. Also, Bofors was the first case that brought the Prime Minister's Office in the pale of probe of the investigating agencies. Also, the country came close to witnessing presidential action against the Prime Minister. Mercifully, the then President Giani Zail Singh, backed off from dismissing Rajiv Gandhi on the issue of Bofors scandal when he was threatened with impeachment.

After all these years of Bofors investigation and several non-Congress regimes, the country is no wiser about who got the bribes in the Bofors deal. With the passage of time attention has also been deflected from all those who were first believed to be the beneficiaries of the bribery scandal. Now there are few that can recall that there were only three people whose names figured in the Bofors FIR filed by the Central Bureau of Investigations. The prominent names included Win Chaddha and G.P. Hinduja. The CBI FIR also mentioned 14 others without identifying them.

It would be worthwhile to recapitulate the circumstances in which the Indian defence minister awarded the contract to Bofors. In February 1984, the cabinet committee, political affairs, gave its approval for the purchase of 155 mm field gun. Three gun systems were evaluated — Sofma of France, Voest Alpine of Austria, and Bofors from Sweden. General Mayadas headed the committee to evaluate the guns. Mayadas committee graded Voest Alpine, the Austrian gun, as the best. Bofors was graded as No. 3. Interestingly, only six members of the 15-member committee signed the report.

Voest Alpine was eliminated from the race after it was found that there were proven accidents about the barrel. The gun barrel was burst in a trial in Belgium, in which a photographer also died. Later, the evaluation committee found the Sofma to be superior to Bofors

on all counts. "Though in guns also the French gun was definitely in our opinion better than the Swedish gun. In the totality the French had many more advantages. One was the range," committee claimed. Mysteriously, the priorities and paradigms were changed and Bofors was considered as the preferred one. The entire Bofors kickback scandal hinges around the circumstances in which Bofors became the preferred gun for the Army. As media investigation would later reveal, the shuffling of priorities took place due to kickbacks that the Swedish company parked through middlemen in Swiss accounts. This was in spite of the fact that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi during his meeting with Swedish counterpart, Olaf Palme, in New York in October 1985, had insisted that there would not be any 'middlemen' employed in the deal. Bofors wrote to the defence ministry that they would like to deal directly with them. Defence secretary S.K. Bhatnagar also wrote to the Swedish company to find out the name of their agent. Bofors informed them about the existence of Win Chaddha and his company, Anatronc General Corporation.

When these formal letters were being exchanged, as media and CBI exposures later revealed, money was being moved from Swedish Banks into shell companies and offshore accounts. As investigations have shown, at the time when the formal exchange of letters was taking place, a Swedish bank was transferring huge monies to shady shell and offshore accounts. It was the presence of these funds in these bank accounts that helped the defence establishment to make up its mind about the Swedish gun.

One part of the Indian establishment gave an impression that it had nothing to do with the allegations of kickbacks. India's ambassador Bhoopatrai Ozha requested the Swedish government to find out about the presence of the middlemen and whether bribes had been paid. The national audit bureau (SNAB) that carried out this request brought out the first official confirmation about the pay-offs. SNAB report exposed that

■ there was an agreement between Bofors and an unnamed company for the settlement of commission after the deal was settled,

■ that considerable amounts have been paid subsequently to, among others, M/s AB Bofors, previous agents in India,

■ that to wind up previous arrange-

ments, cost of 2-3 per cent of the order sum, SEK 170-250 million, were incurred and final payments were made during 1986,

■ and payments totalling SEK 32 million were also made in November-December 1986.

The defence secretary, Bhatnagar, shot off a letter to Bofors expressing righteous indignation over the manner in which the company had violated the agreement by employing an agent. Bofors was also asked to give all the

corruption charge against Rajiv then the entire exercise to build an alternative to the Congress would be squandered. The JPC, as expected, became an instrument to give a clean chit to the Prime Minister and the defence establishment of any malafide.

However, the JPC was furnished details of the pay-offs made by the Bofors to the three companies listed in SNAB report. They were: Svenska, registered in Panama, Moresco/Moineau S.A. (PICO) and AE Services in London. It is in these companies that



Chandra Swami: his arrest was meant to rake up the Bofors issue

information. Newspapers led the investigation and documents carrying the details of bank accounts were published. There were allegations that the money was put in an account called 'Lotus' which was an English translation of Rajiv. The attack was clearly directed at Rajiv Gandhi and the family.

Later, press reports also brought to the fore that state-subsidised export credit may have been used for paying the bribe.

On 7 August, 1987, the government agreed to constitute a Joint Parliamentary Committee under B. Shankaranand. The entire Opposition boycotted it for tactical reasons. Their fear perhaps was that if the committee could not prove the

bulk of the kickbacks were deposited by the Swedish Armament Company. Svenska was linked to Win Chaddha, who left the country in 1987. SEK 188.4 million were paid to the company through normal banking channels. Moresco/Moineau S.A. got SEK 81 million in three instalments. The contract was terminated in January 1986. It is not clear what kind of services these companies were performing.

Perhaps the most mysterious deposits have been made in AE Services. An agreement was entered in 1985 and the company was entitled to 3 per cent commission on sales. SEK 50 million was paid as winding up charges. Interestingly, as soon as the payment was



The Hinduja brothers



Win Chaddha



Ottavio Quattrocchi

Over the last 12 years, people with vested interests have ensured that the investigation remains mired in technical trivia. The issues of human rights, dual criminality and bank confidentiality have been raised to influence the pace of the probe

made in AE Services, Bofors bagged the contract.

After the JPC failed to prove any of the charges, there were fresh revelations after the Swedish prosecutor got into the act. It seized the diary of Martin Ardbo, the former president of Bofors. One of the pages is eloquent enough to throw light on the major players of the Bofors saga. A page from Ardbo's diary reads as follows after his discussion with 'H' in London. "H does not care if Arun Nehru is hurt. He does not mind if even Q is hurt. But G must be saved at all costs." To anybody who has even a nodding acquaintance of Indian politics and its brokers, these initials are self-explanatory. While 'H' is believed to be Hinduja, 'Q' is reportedly Ottavio Quattrocchi, 'G' has been interpreted as Rajiv Gandhi. There were allegations that Martin Ardbo was ensnared by godman Chandra Swami to nail Rajiv in the Bofors case. Ardbo even owned up later that Swami had promised him a job with his disciple, the Sultan of Brunei. The Congress government also arrested Chandra Swami during this period, ostensibly, for alleged FERA violations. The real reason being — an attempt to destabilise Rajiv Gandhi's government.

When the Janata Dal government came to power, The CBI filed its FIR and demanded the freezing of Swiss accounts of AE Services, Anatronc

General Corporation, Amitabh Bachchan, Ajitabh Bachchan, G.P. Hinduja, Prakash Hinduja, Ottavio Quattrocchi, Major Wilson etc.

The gravamen of the CBI case was that Bofors had paid 319.40 million SEK in coded accounts like Lotus, Tulip and Mont Blanc. CBI's request to Swiss authorities claimed that "there are reasons to believe that the remittances made to Lotus, Tulip and Mont Blanc went into the bank accounts in Switzerland operated by M/s Srichand P. Hinduja, Gopichand Hinduja and Prakash Hinduja or corporate bodies controlled by them. All of them are citizens of India."

Recently, Srichand and Gopichand have taken a British citizenship, which, in other words, means that they have gone beyond the pale of Indian investigation. There are also suggestions that the details of the sixth account that are expected shortly from Switzerland may not be to the liking of the Hinduja family. Hence the extreme step to give up Indian nationality.

Over the last 12 years, there have been many attempts at a cover-up. People with vested interests — comprising arms lobbyists and NRI businessmen — have taken pains to ensure that the investigation remains mired in technical trivia. The issue of human rights, dual criminality and bank confidentiality

have been raised from time to time to influence the pace of the probe. Swiss authorities have been given unsigned notes to stall probe by ministers. Solanki, foreign minister, then has been held guilty for this indiscretion, for which he had to pay a heavy price. Vajpayee government's decision to grant permission to prosecute Solanki may further deepen his misery.

In spite of all the delays there is some little understanding of what happened in the Bofors deal. Details of bank accounts, carried by an enterprising CBI chief, Joginder Singh, reveal that Snam Progetti's Quattrocchi got some money out of the deal. Quattrocchi denies it and claims that he was not listed in the original FIR, that he has been victimised due to his proximity to the Nehru-Gandhi family and especially Sonia Gandhi. The CBI put out a red corner notice thus restricting him in Malaysia, where he has been staying since he was forced to leave.

The coming days, if the promise of the arrival of the documents and frenetic activity in Congress circles is anything to go by, would lift the veil from the Bofors mystery. Sonia Gandhi is fighting with her back against the wall over the issue of her foreign origin. She would not like another beachhead to open against her. •

Sanjay Kapoor/New Delhi

Anatomy of

In the second week of April a field operative of the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) sent a report from South Africa. The intelligence report was graphic. In a meeting in Durban, the report claimed, the Tamil Tigers hatched a conspiracy with a group of mercenaries to assassinate Congress president Sonia Gandhi and her daughter, Priyanka.

Graded as reliable and urgent, the RAW report was sent to the Intelligence Bureau (IB) for corroboration and later dissemination to the relevant security agencies. The IB began going through the familiar motions of verifying the contents of the report by collating information from different states. At the time the IB was engaged in the process of checking the veracity of the threat to Sonia, the Bharatiya Janata Party-led ruling alliance was defeated in Parliament and the Congress president had pitched her claims to form the new government. While polity was passing through these turn-of-events, the IB sleuths came upon information that made them sit up. The plan to kill Sonia was identical to the one hatched earlier to assassinate her late husband Rajiv Gandhi, but with a twist. The intelligence agency also found that there was some kind of a dry run to kill Sonia Gandhi.

The IB gathered that the venues identified by the LTTE for carrying out their diabolical mission were not in Tamil Nadu — where they had the support of the local population — but the states of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. The thinking was that Sonia would be targeted when she goes out for election campaigning. IB found that the network the assassins were banking on to execute their task in these states had very exposed political links. The intelligence agency also smelt a definite political connection in the plot. "The assassination by a Tamil group in Madhya Pradesh or UP was not possible till the conspirators were assured of strong local support," informed a senior home ministry official.

As pieces of the jigsaw puzzle began to fit in, there was virtual panic in the government. Quietly, the security of Sonia Gandhi was beefed up. As the Congress president, during this period, was still trying to cobble together a government, there was a belief in the security agencies that after Sonia came to power

**Sonia Gandhi with Priyanka:
prime targets**



a plot

Intelligence agencies discover a conspiracy by the LTTE to assassinate Sonia Gandhi



Arjun Singh: showing concern

The plan to kill Sonia Gandhi was identical to the one hatched earlier to assassinate her late husband Rajiv Gandhi, but with a twist. The intelligence agencies have found that a dry run was also conducted for this

she would have the benefit of a heightened protection normally reserved for the Prime Minister.

Interestingly, Congress leader Arjun Singh got a whiff of the conspiracy too and shot off a letter to President K.R. Narayanan, requesting him to ask the government to provide full protection to Sonia Gandhi. The President forwarded the letter to Prime Minister Vajpayee. But Vajpayee was already seized with the matter and bracing himself to speak to Sonia about it. Later, Vajpayee shared with Sonia the information about the conspiracy and the need for her to exercise discretion.

On 15 May, Sonia Gandhi dropped a bombshell. Reacting sharply to the letter of revolt written by Sharad Pawar, Purno Sangma and Tariq Anwar, Sonia decided to resign as the Congress president. There is a view in the intelligence agencies that Sonia's extreme step to resign — besides her anger at the way Pawar and Sangma behaved — was also influenced by the threat to her life.

On 24 May, Arjun Singh alleged a fascist conspiracy against Sonia Gandhi. Citing history to prop up his theory, Singh saw in the campaign unleashed by the Sangh Parivar against Sonia's foreign origins a repetition of what the country had seen in 1948 against Mahatma Gandhi and in 1989-91 against Rajiv Gandhi. Singh elevated the threat to Sonia at an ideological level and also brought to the fore the issue of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination. The case has acquired a new twist after Ranganath, an accused discharged by the Supreme Court, claimed that godman Chandra Swami had bankrolled Rajiv's killing and also blessed the 'one-eyed Jack' Sivarasan.

The SIT investigation in Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, it may be recalled, has not been able to establish the identity of the financiers as well as the source of the explosives. It is from this standpoint that Ranganath's remarks merit urgent attention. The Jain Commission that probed the wider conspiracy behind the assassination had hinted at the involvement of godman Chandra Swami and his arms dealer friend Adnan Khashoggi in



**Prime Minister Vajpayee:
wise counsel**

Arjun Singh got a whiff of the conspiracy and shot off a letter to President K.R. Narayanan, who forwarded it to Prime Minister Vajpayee. The PM shared with Sonia the information about the conspiracy

providing the financial back-up. The commission had demanded further investigation into the conduct of Chandra Swami.

Predictably, the LTTE quickly issued a denial, distancing itself from any conspiracy. The denial, according to LTTE-watchers, was seen as a confirmation of the involvement of the Tigers. The IB reports also indicated that the Tigers could tie up with Sikh terrorists and other extremist groups.

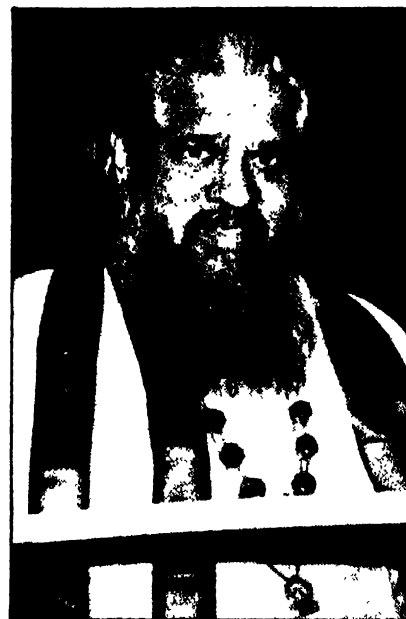
Prime Minister Vajpayee knew the serious nature of the threat to Sonia and directed the home ministry to provide foolproof cover for her.

What was proving to be intriguing to the Intelligence Bureau was Tamil Tiger's confidence to hunt down its quarry in the Hindi heartland. IB got down to figure out whether the LTTE had any sympathisers in UP and MP. Investigations revealed that when EPRLF leader Varadarajan Perumal was under the Government of India's protection in Chanderi, the LTTE had sent its killer squad there. But as the local network in MP was very inadequate, the hit squad was arrested. But this time round, the IB is apprehensive about the quality of ground support that the killers might tap. Under intense pressure from her partymen, Sonia Gandhi withdrew her resignation on 25 May. But before that,

the agencies had put in place an elaborate security cover around her. In fact, senior leaders of the party were taken aback when they found IO, Janpath being aggressively sanitised by the intelligence agencies and Delhi Police.

The agencies feared that the killer squad could even make an attempt on Sonia's life in the capital itself by using a car bomb fitted with IED (improvised

Chandra Swami: money matters



explosive device) — the kind Tamil Tigers have used successfully in Colombo. The possibility of another human bomb was also not ruled out. It was because of these reasons and more that the AICC session saw heightened security.

The Union home ministry, realising that the full implications of the RAW report will reveal itself only during the election campaign in August-September, has begun its interaction with the police chiefs of various states. The endeavour is to create systems to ensure no gaps in providing protection to the VVIPs like Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and Sonia Gandhi. Observations made by Justice J.S. Verma on the lapses in the security of Rajiv Gandhi have been followed closely.

Unlike in the past, the home ministry would like to obtain the entire campaign schedule of the Congress president so that it can provide adequate security. Such an early warning may facilitate the task of the police in providing a security ring around the VVIP. But it would also give assassins plenty of time to explore the weak links in it.

As any security expert will tell you, the surest way to deny an assassin success is unpredictability. •

Sanjay Kapoor/New Delhi



LONELY AT THE TOP: chief minister Chandrababu Naidu

ANDHRA PRADESH

A quiet party

The Mahanadu has revealed Chandrababu Naidu's isolation in the political spectrum

Chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu has kicked off the Telugu Desam Party's (TDP) election campaign last fortnight with a two-day convention in Hyderabad. The Mahanadu is TDP's annual stock-taking event — a tradition started by its founder N.T. Rama Rao. This is when the party usually does its muscle-flexing. This time, however, the results were ambiguous.

For one, since the time the TDP severed its ties with the National/United Front and is still undecided on an alliance with the BJP, there were no national leaders present during the Mahanadu. This was unusual. N.T. Rama Rao had made a tradition of calling in leaders of other parties and in fact it was at one such Mahanadu — attended by the likes of V.P. Singh and leaders as far away as the National Conference's Farooq Abdulla — that the idea of a National Front was first mooted and given shape. This was the second time since NTR's ouster by his son-in-law that the TDP has partied alone. Naidu's isolation from the rest of the political spectrum has never seemed more complete.

Perhaps conscious of this, Naidu repeatedly stressed the decisive role played by the TDP in the formation of the last two governments — first time with only 18 MPs in hand and the second time with just 12 MPs. More importantly, the one resolution passed by the party convention had nothing to do with Andhra Pradesh but with Sonia Gandhi. Taking the cue from Sharad Pawar, the TDP resolved to push for a constitutional amendment that would restrict posts of President, vice-president and Prime Minister for Indian-born citizens only. Without mentioning Sonia Gandhi's name, the resolution said that persons of foreign origin could not provide leadership to the country with such a diverse historical and cultural legacy. "Only those who belong here can understand the soul of Indians," the motion said.

The resolution went a step further than Pawar and came up with a few historical and recent instances to prove its point: Sonali Rossellini, married to Italian filmmaker Roberto Rossellini, was barred from contesting even a municipal election in Italy in recent times; and in history, when the Maurya king Chandragupta's son married the daughter of Celucus, a Greek

army chief, he was disqualified from ascending the throne of the Magadha empire by Chanakya.

Though the TDP intends to use Sonia Gandhi's Italian origins to the hilt in the coming polls, Naidu is aware that this alone will not win him an election. The fact that 4,000 partymen who attended the first day's delegates' meet were so lackadaisical must be worrying Naidu. The only time his audience reacted was when he promised 33 per cent reservation for women; some women obviously cheered. Otherwise, Naidu had little to say that could move the crowd.

Part of the reason for this lies of course with Naidu's business-like nature and a degree of honesty with his people: "I cannot claim that we have fulfilled all the promises made during the earlier elections. But I can say that we are marching in that direction." Besides, most people are scared of figures like Rs 400 crore for Scheme A and Rs 600 crore for Scheme B etc. Naidu is aware of this painful fact. He has attempted to make up for it with huge cutouts of, and frequent references to, N.T. Rama Rao. These were missing last year because the scars of the coup were still fresh in everyone's minds.

At the end of the day, however, Chandrababu Naidu is a great organiser. His public meeting was well-attended as he tele-conferenced with district leaders throughout the day. Plus, he hopes to cash in not only on developmentally-rational programmes like the Janmabhoomi, but also on last-minute sops like the over 8 to 13 per cent hike in dearness allowance for state government staff that he announced a day before the Mahanadu. Before Sonia Gandhi jumped into Congress politics, he also had another major comfort: if Digvijay Singh could overcome the incumbency factor to return to power the second time in Madhya Pradesh, surely, he could do it too.

But Sonia Gandhi has complicated the political scene in AP. Will she be seen here as the Gandhi *bahu* or as the Italian housewife? In the last parliamentary elections, the TDP and the Congress stood almost on par. Will Naidu be able to manage that minor but crucial swing in his favour?

The bookies are not ready to bet as yet. •

Sarita Rani/Hyderabad

WEST BENGAL

People's power

The ruling party's pet thermal plant is set to go on stream amidst controversy

In the early Eighties, the Left Front government had decided that a thermal power station should be set up at Bakraswar, in Birbhum district, to give more power to the people. Chief minister Jyoti Basu, inaugurating the Bakreswar Thermal Power Project (BkTPP) in 1983, had appealed to people to pitch in so that the project becomes a success. In the CPI(M) rank and file, this appeal was converted to a slogan: "We will build BkTPP with our blood."

It has taken 16 years. The BkTPP is now all set to go on stream on the eve of the next millennium with its 210 MW first unit. But the irony is: the people's power project now faces opposition from those who are supposed to benefit from it.

Local and national organisations like Bakreswar Thermal



SUPPORTING ROLE: Medha Patkar

Power Landless Peoples' Sangram Samiti, Chinpai (Panchagram-Bakreswar) Landless Peoples' Samiti, the Birbhum unit of the National Alliance of People's Movement (NAPM), Paschimanga Krishak Sangha and Birbhum Zilla Krishak Mukti Morcha are up in arms against the project for not fulfilling its promise.

To understand what these broken promises are, one has to go back in time. According to a BkTPP official, the project cost has gone up from Rs 1,000 crore to Rs 2,300 crores. To tide over the funds problem, the project had gone in for Japanese OECF loan, despite the state government's promise of not taking any foreign financial help, alleged a NAPM activist.

At the initial stage, crores of rupees had poured in when CPI(M) cadres embarked on a donation drive for the construction work. It is alleged that no account has been kept. Tenures of labourers engaged at the initial stages have been terminated. It has also been alleged that the CPI(M)-controlled Zilla

The lone crusader

Karnataka chief minister J.H. Patel remains equidistant from both the Congress and the BJP

There are things which get even a normally laidback J.H. Patel, chief minister of Karnataka, worried. For instance, the Janata Dal (JD)—or whatever is left of it—could be falling to pieces. But for Patel, the party's identity is an issue to reckon with.

This is precisely why the CM is neither willing to lose its 'secular' and 'pro-poor' image nor get slotted as a 'power hungry' party by getting into 'opportunistic' alliances on the eve of Assembly and parliamentary elections.

Last week, the chief minister made his poll strategy clear. Despite resistance from the party rank and file, Patel announced that he will have no political understanding with either the Congress or the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for the Assembly or parliamentary elections. The CM has been consistently advocating equidistance from both the parties for quite some time now. The reasons for doing this are many.

Parishad has become the clearing house for contracts. Workers also complain that Rs 17 were deducted by force from each of them per day for setting up labour cooperatives. Predictably, this money has also done the vanishing act.

Land acquisition for the project has also caused resentment among local people. Water for the power station is going to be drawn from the right bank canal of Mayurakshi river near Tilpara Barrage through a 17-km-long pipeline. This pipeline has made thousands of people homeless and without jobs. It has affected landowners, *bargadars*, marginal farmers and landless labourers alike. Local people had protested against BkTPP's land acquisition. Facing resistance, authorities had to backtrack. Villagers also report that on 11 April, 1999, a band of CPI(M) cadres along with the police went to acquire land by force. They, of course, had tacit support of BkTPP authorities.

NAPM state coordinator Sukhendhu Bhattacharyya told SUNDAY that at least 7,000 families have lost their land. One member from each family was promised a job. So far, only 18 people — most of them CPI(M) supporters — have been absorbed. "We plan to provide jobs to around 1,000 families who have lost their land. So far, 20 have been absorbed. They will be engaged in BkTPP and its ancillary projects," an official said.

There is a Supreme Court order in this regard which says that if a project involves acquiring private land, people losing land will have to be given preference while distributing jobs. Besides, BkTPP authorities also admit that according to a provision in the West Bengal Electricity Act, providing jobs to those who lose their land is a legal obligation. But local residents are not convinced. "If 20 landless families get absorbed in 16 years, how long will it take for the rest to get absorbed," wonders Debraj Mukherjee, a local villager.

Like any other mega project, the power plant will also have its environmental impact. NAPM and other organisations are



SPOT OF TROUBLE: the project site at Bakreswar

apprehensive that large tracts of agricultural land in Birbhum, Murshidabad and Burdwan districts will be seriously affected due to drawing of water from the Mayurakshi river. An estimated 67 cusec (57,88,800 cubic feet per day) will be needed. This is likely to lead to loss of Rs 44 crore per year during the *boro* season only. "Sooner the villagers understand the reality, the better for them. They should get united to launch their protest against the BkTPP till their demands are fulfilled," said Medha Patkar.

To register their protest, organisations championing the cause of the landless are planning to call a *bandh* on the day the plant will go on stream. Authorities maintain that they are doing their best to address the problem of displacement. But their best may not be good enough. •

Ashis Basu/Bakreswar

The BJP, with its communal image and passion for Hindutva, has driven a wedge between Patel and former chief minister and Lok Shakti supremo Ramakrishna Hegde. Though Hegde has been trying to woo Patel, the latter has brushed aside the offer of fighting an election on a common platform.

Other detractors within the JD are desperate to have an electoral understanding with the Congress. For Patel, **ONE-MAN ARMY: chief minister J.H. Patel**



Sonia Gandhi's Italian origin is something which he does not wish to ignore. Despite the mounting pressure from party colleagues, Patel has so far refused to have anything to do with the Congress.

Last week, the Karnataka CM congratulated Sharad Pawar for taking a stand on the issue of Sonia's Italian origins. "We are on a similar line of thinking," he quipped during a press conference. "We can have talks with him if he sticks to his anti-Congress and anti-BJP stance," Patel added.

The question is whether any of this will work for the chief minister in Karnataka or whether this self-assertion will click with the electorate.

"It seems the party's political future and survival are not really important for the chief minister," says a disgruntled Cabinet minister. "The party's survival is at stake and the CM is getting into higher moral issues," he added. Leave alone outsiders, the JD has had enough trouble from its own members. The latest in the list of those who quit the party in search of greener pastures is Qamrul Islam, the former MP from Gulbarga who resigned from the post of chairman of the Karnataka State Minorities Commission.

The Janata Dal is fighting on too many fronts. With Patel as its lone crusader, there seems little hope for survival. •

Amrta Joshi/Bangalore

Is it war?

The answer depends on which channel you are watching

Is it war, or war-like? That depended upon which spokesperson you caught in the past week, as the fighting in Kargil intensified and the casualty rate climbed. Most of the TV reporters who reached the icy wastes of the battle zone scrambled for purchase, as they searched for vantage points, and points-of-view. Once again, we got a graphic idea of the terrible hardship our soldiers have to face when they are guarding our increasingly porous borders.

Of course, only if you watched the Indian channels would you have thought that India was reacting to a well-designed move by Pakistan to get back the Kashmir issue on the international agenda. The BBC insisted on putting 'intruders' into highly sceptical quotes, and only toward the end of last week, Mark Woolridge managed to report on the situation from the Line-of-Control without injecting a doubt as to India's version.

PTV (Pakistan TV) went to town with high purple prose about the *shaheeds* who were laying down their lives for the nation: with amazing alacrity they also put out perio-



MOVING IMAGES: the war zone in Kargil

dic bulletins through the day to inform the viewers about fresh body counts and other atrocities the Indian forces were wrecking on the poor innocent civilians. This all before Pramod Mahajan, I&B minister, ordered it off the air.

There were also appeals to the Western nations to intervene and help stabilise the situation. We could have told the PTV broadcasters to save their breath because the Western media was too wrapped in Kosovo and the fresh moves NATO was making. If you saw the weightage the BBC gave Kargil mid-week, when fighting had really intensified, you would have thought that here were these two poor West Asian countries squabbling yet again, and it wasn't worth the fuss they were making.

You could have, if you wanted, tuned in instead to Bollywood charmer Aamir Khan battling the spies of the ISI in *Sarfarosh*, his latest film, which some enterprising cable operators kept running through the week—a timely instance of fiction imitating fact. •

Party line

The DMK General Council endorses Karunanidhi's decision to team up with the BJP

It was a Catch-22 situation for M. Karunanidhi. His former allies, especially the Left, are angry with him for "ditching" them and joining hands with the BJP. At the same time, it was his allies who were largely responsible for pushing him into such a situation. The General Council of the DMK, the party's powerful policy-making body, has already endorsed Karunanidhi's decision to firm up the alliance with the BJP when it met on 2 June.

There was a rumour that a section of the DMK cadres was against the tie-up with the BJP for the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections. They felt that it would not only be anti-Dravidian but would also endanger the party's solid Muslim vote bank. DMK's erstwhile Muslim allies, like Indian Union Muslim League and sympathisers like the TMMK, had warned of dire consequence if the party linked up with the BJP.

It is reported that the Al Umma had issued a friendly warning to the DMK when stockpiles of bombs with timer devices were found in Madras, Tiruchi and Coimbatore near police buildings. The handbills found at some of the sites ridiculed Karunanidhi's pet project *Samathuvapurams* (casteless society) and called for a ban on RSS and Hindu Munnani. Karunanidhi later confessed to the press that the handbills recovered at some of the sites hold a threat to him and his government. Karunanidhi also disclosed that six months back, the central intelligence agencies had written a letter, informing that he and his son M.K. Stalin and a few others were in the "hit list — Z-plus category". Karunanidhi added that it was not just the Al Umma, the banned Muslim outfit, but also other fanatic groups which were behind the planting of bombs in different cities in the state.

As expected, Karunanidhi did not face dissent or revolt at DMK's General Council meeting, though there was tremendous pressure, especially from pro-Muslim groups, not to have any truck with the BJP.

All the same, the DMK leadership is determined to go all out against these forces. The leadership would also like to explain to the people the circumstances that have forced the party to do so. Other smaller regional BJP allies in Tamil Nadu like the PMK, the MDMK and the TRC are keeping a low profile and has more or less agreed to fall in line with the decisions taken by their big brother DMK as far as seat-sharing in Tamil Nadu is concerned.

Meanwhile, AIADMK supremo, Jayalalitha, finally appeared before the special judge after recovering from 'illness'. But CPI(M) general secretary Harkishen Singh Surjeet's visit to her Poes Garden residence to talk about alliance strategies to "defeat the BJP-DMK combine" came as a big boost for her.

The DMK General Council endorsing the Karunanidhi line has come as a gift for the chief minister who turned 76 on 3 June. •

Sreedhar Pillai/Madras



SUNDAY WEEK

KUSUM BHANDARI

BEGINNING 13 JUNE, 1999

ARIES

(21 March-20 April)

Don't go looking for immediate results. Investment matters especially should be viewed in a long-term perspective. It may be better to transfer slow-moving capital investments to more active ones. Terms of maintenance payments to ex-spouses or dependents can be agreed upon without recriminations.

TAURUS

(21 April-20 May)

Do not under-estimate the support and encouragement that is on offer from family members. They may see trouble approaching that you have not yet spotted. Trying to pressurise answers to important issues from people who hold the reins of power can simply make them more stubborn.

GEMINI

(21 May-20 June)

You should do all you can to avoid head-on collisions and confrontations. You are more likely to get your own way by appearing to acquiesce to other people's demands. In fact, you should go on quietly with your own way of doing things. Fights will only escalate once they are engaged in.

CANCER

(21 June-20 July)

It may be better to do less, but to do so at a higher finish or quality. Over-stretching your capacities will lead to gross errors. Legal complications regarding inheritances and legacies will be easier to sort out. Do not acquiesce to unreasonable demands.

LEO

(21 July-20 August)

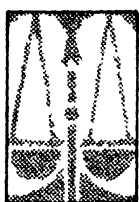
Your love life may be disconcerting. Someone very dear to you may have let you down. The attraction of business may mean losing out at home. There is some desire to take the easy way out. Options are not at all clear, so you could be on a losing streak. It is better to play it by the ear for now.



LIBRA

(21 September-20 October)

Nothing should be taken for granted in professional or career matters. Appearances may belie the true facts. People may try to outwit you. It is unwise to take people at face value. What they have to say about themselves may be far from true. You can find yourself in awkward but tempting situations.



SAGITTARIUS

(21 November-20 December)

This may not be the best of weeks. Your boss can have plans for you that don't suit your mood. You wish to be left in peace but are not going to get it that way. Delving into financial backgrounds may be upsetting. What is worse is that you cannot keep such matters under cover.

CAPRICORN

(21 December-20 January)

Try getting out and about and enjoying yourself. Visits to the theatre, films or restaurants will provide a pleasant break from routine. Your love life can take a distinct upward turn. Make the most of this time as it may be an island in the middle of a turbulent sea as regards the next few days.

AQUARIUS

(21 January-20 February)

You may finally realize that you are barking up the wrong tree. With fewer pressures on you in professional and business affairs, this is a good time for going over accounts and up-dating expense accounts. Friends can make cheerful and stimulating company. Group activities can be fun.

PISCES

(21 February-20 March)

Problems must not be swept under the carpet. The best solution to worrying factors is to face them. Come straight to the point where there are important issues to discuss. Protecting yourself or others now will only store up bigger problems.

VIRGO

(21 August-20 September)

It is important to regulate your life now. It would be a mistake to push yourself to any limit. Impatience can lead to much wasted effort. It seems that you are right on target for finishing work loads. There should be no pressing need to cut corners.

SCORPIO

(21 October-20 November)

The week is favourable for collecting as much data relevant to current or pending business activities as possible. Facts can be unearthed now that allow you to increase turnover. Children will need more guidance. Family gatherings will be cheerful.

At stake

President K.R. Narayanan is back in action. He has raised queries about the disinvestment of government equity in Indian Airlines, forcing the government to put the matter on the back burner.



K.R. Narayanan: exercising his prerogative

The disinvestment of the government stake up to 51 per cent in the airline had been a commitment made by the finance minister in his last Budget speech. After a great deal of discussion and fine-tuning, a package was evolved involving fresh government equity of Rs 125 crore into the debt-ridden airline. Disinvestment was to follow.

A decision was even taken to engage a global merchant banker. The core group of secretaries gave its nod to the proposal.

But when the proposal went to the President, he sought some clarifications. Especially about spending Rs 125 crore of public money on the venture.

Rashtrapati Bhavan did not feel obliged to raise any such query when during the caretaker term of I.K. Gujral's government, an equity infusion of several crores of rupees was made in the Scheduled Caste and Tribe Finance Corporation. There was even less chance that this

HEARD IN NORTH BLOCK

At this rate, it is not just the finance ministry which will be calculating compound fractions.

A BUREAUCRAT ON THE FORTHCOMING HUNG LOK SABHA

manufacturing unit in Pune.

Piaggio is, however, not going to give up its equity in LML and is fighting LML MD Deepak Singhania to the bitter end.

Singhanian and LML believe that there is nothing more Piaggio can give them — they can get the same, if not better, technology from any of the other competitors.

However, for Piaggio, it is a matter of retaining what they hold.



Deepak Singhania: not bothered

venture would succeed.

No one knows what the fate of the disinvestment process will be.

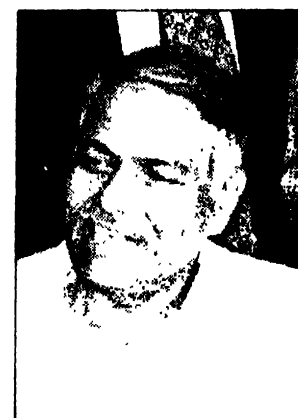
Different roads

The tussle over the ownership of LML Scooters has reached a turning point with one of the erstwhile partners in the joint venture, the Italian firm Piaggio, deciding to start its own

The next phase of the battle will be the race for a market.

Sweet nothing

As elections draw closer, finance minister Yashwant Sinha is under



Yashwant Sinha: holding his own

more and more pressure from Cabinet colleagues to bring down taxes and duties. However, Sinha is saying 'no' to everyone as politely and firmly as he can.

Take the sugar lobby. Agriculture minister Surjit Singh Barnala has met the finance minister at least 15 times last month to impress upon him the need to increase import duty on sugar from abroad, especially Pakistan, because Indian manufacturers of sugar are suffering.

The Indian sugar manufacturers would like the import duty to be hiked to 40 per cent. Sinha has refused. He may agree to increase it to 30 per cent but sugar manufacturers say it is not profitable for them to produce sugar unless foreign sugar is 40 per cent dearer.

Sinha is holding his own, because he knows a finance minister who gives in to pressure becomes a creature of industry. Watch this space for a war of another kind. •

CHECK-LIST

Candidates for finance minister

■ **Congress:** Now it has come out that if the Congress had won the vote of confidence, Sonia Gandhi would have made Manmohan Singh the Prime Minister. It may still happen. If it does, and the TMC joins the Congress, P. Chidambaram will probably get his old job back.

■ **Bharatiya Janata Party:** Definitely Yashwant Sinha. There is no one else who understands finance and the working of the government.

■ **Third Front:** It is hard to say. But if Sharad Pawar has his say, he himself will become finance minister in return for supporting a BJP government from the outside.

Back to business

Jayalalitha's tantrums have begun.

The hostess with the mostest has been hosting Dr Manmohan Singh and A.K. Antony — both shy and quiet gentlemen of the Congress — to breakfast and lunch. But who's had whom for breakfast is not quite clear. She began by saying she would give the Congress six seats. Then as a favour to the two gentlemen, she upped this to ten seats.

But she's not willing to



Jayalalitha throwing tantrums

budge beyond ten. And the Congress is wondering what to do next. Should they dump Jayalalitha? In which case they would be left with only three seats, assuming they do a deal with the TMC. Sonia Gandhi summoned G.K. Mooppanar to the capital and he came as soon as he was whistled for. Now it is a question of finding out who can deliver what. And the Congress is furious with Shree Pawan because he was the one who was negotiating with Jayalalitha, apparently to tell her the Congress would be happy with just ten seats.

Can he deliver?

It is now almost certain that the BJP in Haryana will withdraw support from the Bhai Lal

HEARD IN BANGALORE

Q: What does the Janata Dal in Karnataka have in common with the Catholic church?

A: Both believe in the father (H.D. Deve Gowda) and the son (Revanna). And the way things are going, the Janata Dal will be a Holy Ghost soon.

A JANATA DAL WORKER

government in the state around the end of June and create a situation where fresh elections will have to be held.

Apparently, a letter addressed to the Haryana governor is already with Punjab chief minister Prakash Singh Badal who has shown

it to Om Prakash Chautala to dissuade him from making any precipitate moves.

Chautala's party, the Indian National Lok Dal, will then enter into a formal alliance with the BJP for the general elections and will contest the Assembly election in the same alliance.

CHECK-LIST

Laloo Prasad Yadav's coterie

■ Sadhu Yadav: Laloo's wife's brother and principal muscle-power raiser. Has a band of thugs who are used for urban pressure tactics, especially when Patna businessmen have to be taught to see reason.

Sadhu Yadav is a nominated member of the Legislative Council under the quota meant for the chief minister under the category fine arts. A case has been filed in the High Court against his nomination from this category.

■ Subhash Yadav: Another brother of Laloo's wife Rabri Devi. Also a nominated MLC. Organises transfers and postings and the routine wheeler-dealing in government. The man to see if you're a bureaucrat and want to get a posting of your choice. But don't go without a suitcase.

■ Jagdish Prasad Singh: Senior minister holding the portfolio of water resources. The chief of Laloo's think-tank. He's the one who formulates strategy, plans and alliances.

■ Subhash Chandra Marayam Yadav: Has the education portfolio in the Rabri Devi government. Laloo's official scribe, handles funding, resources, etc. Has been minister for education since 1980. Laloo doesn't move without his advice.

■ Ramkrishna Yadav: Former Patna MP, now national general secretary for the RJD and M.L.A. handles all Dal matters. Known as the mouthpiece for Laloo. Has performed synchronicity to a fine art. Also handles landgrabber in the state capital.



Om Prakash Chautala with the BJP

Whether Chautala has that kind of following in Haryana is a moot point. Not so long ago, Chautala had managed to win four Lok Sabha seats because of a tie-up with the Bahujan Samaja Party. It has to be seen if he can manage the election and deliver to the BJP on his own.

The party is over

The Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh is all set to split as Beni Prasad Varma gets ready to join the Congress with at least three other MPs.

Varma is holding talks with a joint secretary of the Congress from his district (Barabanki) as he is fed up of Mulayam's conspiratorial politics. He has told the Congress that he will join along with other ex-MPs (who will get the Congress tickets in the next elections). This includes Mitransen Yadav and Ashok Varma.

When the proposed defection was brought to Mulayam Singh Yadav's attention, his response was merely: "If he wants to go let him go. We will not try and stop him." ■

Beyond the brief

After the storm over the briefing given to the BJP by the top brass of the Indian Army, the Prime Minister held a meeting to try and find out how this had happened.

He asked George Fernandes why he had taken the generals to the briefing.



"Because Advaniji asked me to," replied a non-plussed Fernandes.

Then Yashwant Sinha spoke. He told the government that what had been done was completely wrong. It set a wrong tradition. Fernandes replied heatedly that there was nothing wrong in anyone briefing anyone. "I'm prepared to send the army to brief the Congress Working Committee, if they so want," said Fernandes.

"That's what we did wrong," said Sinha firmly. "It would have been much better if you had sent the generals to the Congress to brief them, instead of sending them to us."

The peacemaker

Former Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral is a keen votary of the idea that former Prime Ministers should not stand on prestige and accept lesser portfolios. What is wrong, after all, in an ex-PM becoming a home minister, a defence minister, or even a foreign minister.

In the last few months,

HEARD IN THE BJP HEADQUARTERS

In their party, no Congressman has a cellphone without the Rome facility.

A YUPPIE BJP MEMBER EXPLAINING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE CONGRESS AND THE BJP

Gujral has positioned himself as a dream candidate for foreign minister, no matter which party is in power. By criticising George Fernandes's conduct as defence minister, he has endeared himself to the Congress. By criticising the Congress's role in causing an election, he has made himself popular with the BJP. And by telephoning UN secretary-general Kofi Annan (ensuring Annan calls him back)

A.B. Vajpayee: questioning Fernandes

BAROMETER

L.K. Advani's proteges: who's up, who's down



Govindacharya: Has been put in charge of the party in UP, which was earlier the charge of a senior BJP leader like Sunderlal Patwa (Patwa was divested of the charge because he is ailing), a major shot in the arm for Govind, especially after he successfully defused the leadership crisis in UP.



Pramod Mahajan: L.K. Advani has lost all confidence in his former *chela* and has now made it official by promoting Ram Naik. Although Mahajan is part of the campaign committee, he has not been called to any informal meetings, though once upon a time Mahajan was a daily visitor to the Advani residence.



Ram Naik: The minister of state for railways has been made minister of state for home, in a calculated move to snub Mahajan. It was Mahajan who made sure Naik got only a junior ministership despite his seniority in politics. Advani is trying to correct this.



J.P. Mathur: Earlier, because of his RSS background, was indulged and given charge of the press. But after seeing his performance, has been kept in the background. Advani has let the RSS know that Mathur's performance is below par.



Sushma Swaraj: Active in the campaign committee, released the BJP manifesto in Goa and is active in the press. Has recovered after the Delhi chief ministerial fiasco. Also happy as the drifting Mahajan has returned from his old mission.

he has made himself an indispensable quantity in bringing about peace in the subcontinent.

So don't rule out a second term for Gujral — if not as PM, then as EAM.

RSS's list

Pramod Mahajan had better watch out. The RSS is gunning for him.

The organisation had sent a list of RSS members — journalists, intellectuals, etc. — who were being invited for the discussion-based programme on Doordarshan immediately after the news.

Mahajan ensured that one or two of the names on the list were invited to Doordarshan. But after that the invitations stopped. Another list was sent to him. No names



Pramod Mahajan in a spot

were taken from that list either.

Finally K. Sudarshan, who liaises between the *sangh* and the BJP called on Mahajan. "Why aren't you calling our people?" he asked. "It is very difficult while there is no CEO of Prakash Bharti," said Mahajan. "I can do nothing."

The RSS says its going to make sure someone else is appointed minister for information in the next government. And it will be a person who has Prakash Bharti in his corner.



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Particulars	Financial year ended March 31st, 1999	Financial year ended March 31st, 1998
Total Income	1751.80	1013.70
Total Expenditure	1053.41	679.61
Gross Profit	698.39	334.09
(before depreciation & interest)		
Depreciation	38.83	28.50
Profit before Tax	659.56	305.59
Provision for Taxation	(107.07)	(16.56)
Profit after Tax	552.49	289.03
Provision for Taxation for earlier years	(6.93)	3.86
Net Profit before Dividend Tax	545.56	292.89
Dividend Tax	8.13	3.60
Paid-up Equity Share Capital	192.00	48.00
Reserves	739.62	426.53
EPS (in Rupees)	28.41	15.25*

Rs. in million

* Adjusted for issue of bonus shares made in 1998-99.

Notes:

- 1) Increase in share capital is due to issue of bonus shares in the ratio of 3:1 during 1998-99.
- 2) Company's Y2K exposure is limited to the extent of non-compliance by external agencies. The expenditure to ensure Y2K compliance is not expected to have material effect on the financial statements.
- 3) The aforesaid results have been taken on record by the Board of Directors of the Company at their meeting held on 18th May, 1999.



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Managing Director

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SHOULD CALCUTTA BE RENAMED?

SUNDAY

Pushback takes heavy toll

INDIAN ARMY
LIVINGS

New Delhi, June 11 (AP) — The Indian Army has suffered a heavy toll in the pushback operation in the Kargil sector, officials said Sunday. The army has suffered 17 deaths and 100 injuries in the last 24 hours, they said. The pushback operation is the most intense phase of the conflict since the Indian Army launched its offensive in May.

India outraged over return of mutilated bodies

MAHARASHTRA PRESS

New Delhi, June 11 — The return of mutilated bodies of Indian soldiers to India has outraged the government and the public. The government has demanded that the bodies be returned in a dignified manner and that the soldiers be buried with full military honors.

Death stalks Jawans at every step in Kargil

By Dinesh Kumar
NEW DELHI: It is the most difficult assignment undertaken by the Indian Army since the 1971 war.

The operation to drive out Pakistani-backed infiltrators and recapture large tracts of mountainous territory in the Mushkoh valley, Ladakh district, will be a step by step and inch of land.

The biggest enemy is the weather. With mountains in the way, soldiers are often cut off from their bases and have to fight in the most difficult conditions.

Dying for a greater love

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, June 11: Major Rajesh Singh, 32, died on Sunday while leading his troops in the Kargil sector. He was killed while leading his troops in the Kargil sector. He was killed while leading his troops in the Kargil sector.

India on 'warpath', accuses Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Monday accused India of being on a "warpath" and alleged that Indian fighter jets once again dropped bombs on Islamabad's territory and assaulted its posts across the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir. Pakistan also reiterated an earlier statement made by Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz that the LoC is not clearly demarcated by ground. No wire or posts or signs for LoC are visible on the map. There is no clear demarcation of the LoC.

When will

it END?

Mountains wanting to feel your weight
Forests waiting to be caressed
Waves jumping to touch your face
An ageing aunt longing to hold you
A childhood friend distanced by years

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Letters.....	4
Sight and Sound.....	6
Profile.....	26
Khaas Baat.....	30
Spotlight.....	36
News.....	59
Sunday Week.....	63
Business Diary.....	64
Random Notes.....	65
Delhi Diary.....	66



SCENE

Wanna have a good time, baby?

Meet the women of Premnagar.....38

COLUMNS

MANI-TALK

Mani Shankar Aiyar8

THE SOUTH BLOCK

Inder Malhotra28

MEDIA MUSINGS

V Gangadhar.....56



COVER STORY 12

When will it end?

The Kargil stand-off between India and Pakistan continues

CULTURE 40

Talk of the town

Will the renaming of Calcutta as Kolkata help revive Bengali pride?



EVENT 32

Indian summer

Fans from the subcontinent take over English cricket grounds in a spirit of carnival





Kargil crisis

The crisis in Kargil seems to be a repetition of what had happened in 1962 (*Can India and Pakistan ever be friends*, 6—12 June). The 1962 war with China showed how ill-prepared India was as regards its army and navy. While India under Nehru and Krishna Menon flourished in selling NAM, China got down to basic needs and prepared its army for any eventualities. The result was the drubbing that India received in China's hands.



Similarly, in 1999, Prime Minister Vajpayee seems to be more pre-occupied in breaking the ice with Pakistan. He does not seem to realise that bus journeys and picnics at Islamabad and other cities of Pakistan have very little to do with realpolitik. Perhaps, next time, Vaj-

payee and his Cabinet will be more forthright.
R. Singh, New Delhi

■ The news that the Indian Air Force had launched air attacks on militants in Batalik, Kargil and Dras came as a shock to most people. While there was tension and anxiety all over the country, the army authorities tried vainly to play down the incident before it flared up into a full-scale war between the two countries.

Though the relationship between the two countries has always been far from friendly, life in the valley was relatively peaceful before the Kargil conflict. After a decade of turmoil, tourists were slowly flocking back to Kashmir and the markets and hotels were back in business. Almost 50,000 tourists from all over the country as well as from abroad had come to the Valley in the past two months. But now the tourism trade has been badly hit and it is unlikely that it will revive again in the near future.

Indian troops at Kargil: fighting a difficult battle

Though Farooq Abdullah has promised that there is no possibility of war, people realise that promises are but mere words and will not be fooled so easily.

Raju Ganguly, Calcutta (West Bengal)

Pathetic state

The "letter bomb" written by Sharad Pawar, P.A. Sangma and Tariq Anwar raises some important questions concerning national



Sonia Gandhi: Is she Prime Minister material?

interests (*The challenge*, 23—29 May). The Congress is clinging to Sonia Gandhi and claiming that she is entitled to become PM. Reason: she belongs to the Nehru-Gandhi family. But is this the sole qualification to make the Italian-born Sonia PM of India? Sonia who married Rajiv in 1968 took to Indian citizenship only in 1983, after it became clear that Rajiv would become the PM. Given this background, the revolt by the "Three Man Army" against Sonia is not unreasonable.

Further, what's Sonia's political experience compared to that of Pawar, Sangma, or even Tariq Anwar? She became a Congress party member only two years back. And today she wants to become the PM. Don't Sangma, Pawar and Anwar have a right to protest? If Sonia's only aim is to save and strengthen the Congress, where is the need to nurture prime

ministerial ambitions? It's a pity that a 114-year-old party has to depend on Sonia for survival.

Anjani Puri, New Delhi

■ With reference to the cover story *The challenge*, here are points to ponder for those who are affected by Sonia syndrome:

- Sonia married Rajiv Gandhi in 1968. She could have taken Indian citizenship in 1973. But she did so only in 1983, when Rajiv's chance of becoming PM was certain. Does this prove that India is her country?

- In 1977, after the defeat of Mrs Indira Gandhi, she took refuge in the Italian embassy. Sonia came back to her mother-in-law's house only after much persuasion. Then how can she say that India is her motherland?

- Sonia became a voter in 1980 itself, though she became an Indian citizen in 1983. Doesn't this show her political ambitions at an very early stage?

- If her sole ambition is only to "serve the Congress party" why should she nurture PM ambitions?

- Finally, does she still retain "dual-citizenship" — Indian and Italian?

If Sonia Gandhi would be kind enough to reply to these questions, her position will become much more stronger in the nation.

N. Prasad, New Delhi

Congenital problem

Under Malhotra's *Proxy War* (30 May-5 June) reminded me of Jawaharlal Nehru's statements. The former Prime Minister while talking about Pakistan and

Muslims had said: "We have solved the Muslim problem for all times to come."

"However, Pakistan continues to be the greatest headache to this country...."

Indeed, since 1947, India has fought three bloody wars with Pakistan: in 1948, 1965 and 1971. And it's fighting a low-intensity war in Kashmir since 1989. The Kargil War, despite the much-publicised Gujral Doctrine and Vajpayee's much-trumpeted Bus Diplomacy, only shows that we do not understand Pakistan's psyche.

Vidya Sagar, Delhi

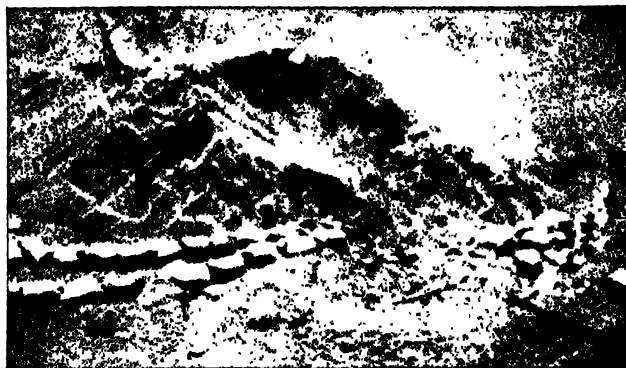
The thin red line

The contradiction in the Left is glaring (*What's Left?*, 23—29 May). On the one hand, the CPI(M) wants to fight against the Congress in its stronghold in Kerala, West Bengal and Tripura, but have decided to support the Congress against the BJP and its allies.

This is the height of political opportunism. Only till recently, the CPI(M) had attacked the Congress as a capitalist outfit. What's more, even today it's critical of the Congress's economic policies. So how can the Left suddenly become the friend of the Congress?

However, the Forward Bloc and the Revolutionary Socialist Party are more honest. They have very correctly asked its big brother, what difference does the Congress really have with the BJP? If the CPI(M) can endorse the pro-Congress line, than what's wrong in adopting a pro-BJP line? After all, the BJP is trying to move away from the Hindutva ideology and during the period the BJP-led government ruled India, there has been no instance of a communal backlash.

S. Iyer, Vellore (Tamil Nadu)



Nuclear test at Pokhran: hour of glory

Nuke reality

Under Malhotra has rightly exposed the "standards" of some Indians who are delighted when others possess nuclear weapons, but consider them dangerous only when India acquires the same nuclear arsenal (*Security check*, 23—29 May).

It's no secret that China is helping Pakistan's nuclear and missile programmes. As a result, Pakistan has developed missiles which can carry nuclear warheads and hit targets as far as in Kanyakumari. China too has stationed nuclear-tipped missiles in Tibet which are directed at major Indian cities. For some Indians all these developments count for nothing. But the sky falls on their

heads only when India fires Agni II missiles and conducts its own nuclear tests to safeguard her security.

It's high time the Indian government went ahead with "further missile tests" ignoring these stupid Indians and made the country's security fool-proof. After all, the world respects only the strong. And India deserves to command respect.

L. Rohini, Tiruchy (Tamil Nadu)

My story

This relates to the passage extracted from Amita Malik's autobiography, *No Holds Barred* (9-15 May). Amita writes that I told her a 'lie' about her Delhi Letter. Well, I did, in order not to hurt her by telling the truth.

SEPARATED AT BIRTH?



Contributed by Nilima Banerjee, Calcutta (West Bengal)

Now that she has asked for it, the truth was that I stopped her column, when readers stopped reading it.

The *Weekly* readers of those days, accustomed to the sparkle and style and, of course, substance of articles by contributors such as V.S. Naipaul, Kingsley Martin, Nirad C. Chaudhuri, G.V. Desani, Aubrey Menen, Raja Rao, B. Rajan, etc., wouldn't accept anything less.

Amita's column started off well: bright, breezy and even belligerent, informed by good taste, concern for falling moral values and social graces and a healthy passion for excellence in style and content. But gradually her Delhi Letter lost its sting and slid into an overdose of the first person singular — an embarrassment not only to the editor but to the author too. Which being Amita Malik she never realised!

She writes I asked her to write on Yamini Krishnamurti. I don't remember. Perhaps I did, out of my frenzied admiration for the great artiste who I thought deserved maximum exposure possible. Never mind who wrote what, so long as people kept writing or talking about her. I thought Amita, a professional columnist with a wide range of interests and a gift of expression, would be willing to write on Yamini who was a rage at that time. How could any one not be provoked to write on her? But Amita must have sulked and declined, since I didn't carry anything by her on the legendary dancer.

I'm sorry if my 'lie' has hurt Amita. The truth would have hurt her even more. My appeal to her: Dear, write whatever you fancy, but write with dignity, authority, accountability and, most important, with feminine grace.

A.S. Raman, former editor, The Illustrated Weekly of India, (Maharashtra)

MILESTONES

APPOINTED: R.R. Shah, additional secretary in the information and broadcasting ministry, as acting CEO of Prasar Bharati, on 11 June. He replaced acting director O.P. Kejriwal.

DECLARED: by the Manipur chief secretary, on 7 June, the entire state as disturbed area, for a period of six months from 1 June.

SHIFTED: Ram Jethmalani, to the ministry of law, justice and company affairs. He



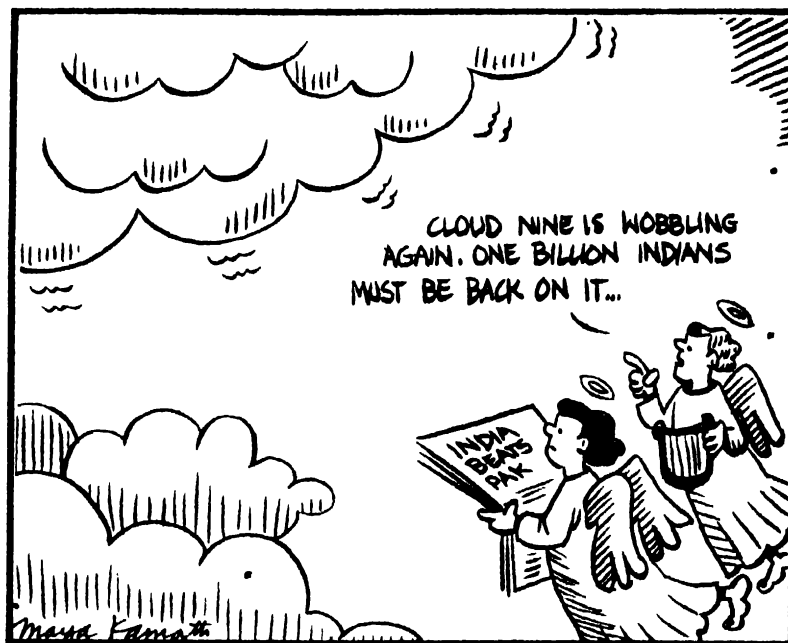
is replaced by Jagmohan who held the communications portfolio.

SWORN-IN: Luizinho Faleiro, as chief minister of Goa, on 9 June. Earlier he was elected leader of the Congress Legislature Party.

STAYED: by Supreme Court, on 7 June, the execution of four convicts in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case, till 19 July.

WON: by Leander Paes and Mahesh Bhupathi, the French Open doubles title, on 6 June. This is the first Grand Slam title won by any Indian player.

SIGHT & SOUND



MAYA KAMATH/THE ASIAN AGE

■ The Congress is hurt by what Pawar has done and we hope he succeeds in hurting the Congress more. Anything that hurts the Congress directly benefits us.

GEORGE FERNANDES, defence minister and convener of the National Democratic Alliance

■ If you invite American opinion on Kashmir, you will get an American plan for the Kashmir problem.

HENRY KISSINGER, in Bombay, speaking on globalisation

■ The difference between 1965, 1971 and now is television. Leaders get on TV and say the most ridiculous things.

K.P.S. GILL, former director-general of Punjab Police, on politicians speaking on the Kargil conflict



■ What we have witnessed is not simply a breach of international norms but civilisational crime against humanity and barbaric medievalism. I am outraged. I feel I have been personally violated.

JASWANT SINGH, external affairs minister, after brutality committed on Indian soldiers

■ George suffers from an ailment called premature articulation.

K. NATWAR SINGH, Congress leader, on George Fernandes

■ Having failed miserably, the Left is today politically isolated as it has never been.

ASHOK MITRA, CPI(M) member of Rajya Sabha

■ We should learn to be patient.

MOHAMMAD AZHARUDDIN, Indian cricket captain

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| ■ Physiotherapists | ■ Vocational Counsellors, Employment Officers and Placement Officers dealing with handicapped | ■ Community Based Rehabilitation Professionals |
| ■ Occupational Therapists | ■ Multipurpose Rehabilitation Therapists, Technicians | ■ Rehabilitation Counsellors/Administrators |
| ■ Speech Pathologists | ■ Rehabilitation Practitioners in | ■ Prosthetists and Orthotists |
| ■ Special Teachers for educating and training the handicapped | | ■ Rehabilitation Workshop Managers |
| ■ Rehabilitation Psychologists | | ■ Ophthalmic Technicians |
| ■ Rehabilitation Social Workers | | |

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BACK TO BASICS

The sacking of Jagmohan



This column has never been particularly kind to Jagmohan. It is, therefore, a particular pleasure to congratulate him on the principled and unexceptionable stand he has taken on the question of businessmen, including multinationals, solemnly honouring their contractual obligations. The first rule of markets is that obligations entered into must be honoured or else the assets of those who break

their word shall be forfeit. Dalal Street operates on this principle. As do Threadneedle Street and Wall Street. Indeed, the entire *sahukari* network rests on this principle. Centuries ago, before colonialism de-industrialised us, international trade was based on *hundis* issued by our Jagat Seths and honoured above any possibility of breach as far away as Damascus and Kashgar. WTO is no different. Contracts are for keeping.

It is the first principle of modern capitalism. You pay your debts. Or you sink. A bankrupt is regarded a criminal liable to arrest and imprisonment. It is the very stuff of Victorian novels. Dickens' Uriah Heep is the paradigm. But in India, the state has always protected the rich. Which is why we have sick industries, but never run into sick industrialists. The cosiest nexus of them all is that which subsists between politicians of a certain kind and plutocrats of a certain kind.

Which is, perhaps, why Pramod Mahajan (the model of politicians of a certain kind) whipped off his lapel microphone and stormed off a TV set when I suggested that the argument he was making might have been cooked up at Nariman Point. I have ever since wondered whether, unknowingly, I had stumbled upon some hidden truth, the full import of which still escapes me. Ironically, the TV debate was about the grant of licences in the telecom sector. Mahajan had just made a considerable name for himself pillorying the hapless Sukh Ram, then Congress minister of communications. He had picked up some dope (or been fed it?) about how a small Indian firm, Himachal Futuristic, with two Third World partners, Bezeq of Israel and Shinwatra of Thailand, had been awarded major contracts for providing basic services in a number of exceptionally lucrative circles. The licence fee (or "levy") they had agreed to pay was way, way above the bid put in by competitors, almost all of whom were the biggest names in Indian industry backed by the biggest multinationals in the telecom



JAGMOHAN

He refused to connive with industry in exempting them from their contractual obligations. He has had to pay a heavy price for his uprightness. With but a hundred days to go to elections, Jagmohan has been turfed out, sent off to urban development

business worldwide. Mahajan was not only persuaded that the Himachal consortium would not be able to pay the promised fee, he was also livid that, after the bids had come in, a cap had been put on the number of circles that any one operator could

get. This, he argued, would not only enable the Himachal consortium to wriggle out of the astronomic bid they had submitted, it would also enable them to choose the most lucrative circles, leaving but the crumbs for the others. The sacred principle of goal posts not being changed after the game had started had, said Mahajan, been violated. Clearly, he thundered, there was the stench of corruption behind the whole exercise.

AS SUKH RAM FUMLED, barely able to understand the question let alone give coherent answer, the BJP stormed the well of the House. For 13 days, Parliament was held to ransom. When, eventually, Sukh Ram was permitted to state his side of the case, the Opposition would not let the minister read out his statement. He had to content himself placing it on the Table of the House, to be consigned from there direct into the morgue of the day's printed proceedings. Nor would the Opposition allow a debate on the subject. Democracy has never been a strong point with fascists.

It is now a thousand days since the BJP disrupted the House and Mahajan disrupted our TV debate. Sukh Ram is no longer one of us. It is on his trustworthy shoulders that the BJP has wrested Himachal Pradesh. Sukh Ram's son has been rewarded for services rendered with a BJP seat in the Rajya Sabha (deliciously close to Mahajan's). Also, a large, leafy bungalow in Tughlaq Lane with puja rooms secure from the prying eyes of the CBI. That, however, is a matter between the BJP and its conscience.

What is more relevant to the present is the matter of honouring contractual engagements. By giant consortiums at that, including the biggest of the multinationals. And the best and the brightest of Indian industry. Jagmohan refused to connive with industry in exempting them from their contractual obligations. He has had to pay a heavy price for his uprightness. With but a hundred days to go to elections, Jagmohan has been turfed out, sent off to urban development, while the Prime Minister himself moves into the green pastures of communications.

The Prime Minister, of course, has other things on his mind. Kargil, for example. So it is hardly likely that he will lock himself up with a roomful of multinationals to help them negotiate their way out of the hole they have got themselves into. There can be little doubt, therefore, that it is Vajpayee's Mukhota For All Seasons who will do the actual wheeling and dealing. Back we come to the Walker-off-TV-sets. With the mandate to renegotiate — to mutual advantage, need one stress? — what had been settled and sealed at the time the contracts were signed. The money involved is a cool Rs 4,500 crore, perhaps more. Not Mahajan's. But yours. And mine. Which he or some BJP agent, unless it be the PM himself, will negotiate back into the poverty-stricken hands of the richest businessmen in India and their billionaire multinational partners. On the very eve, let it be noted, of an expensive elections. Truly, a Government with a Difference.

THE CURRENT CONTROVERSY IS over cellular telepho-



MAHAJAN

It is hardly likely that the PM will lock himself up with a roomful of multinationals to help them negotiate their way out of the hole they have got themselves into. It is Vajpayee's Mukhota For All Seasons who will do the actual wheeling and dealing

nes, the first gift of Lib-Glob to our telecom sector. It involves such Indian giants as the Ruias of Essar, the Mittals, the Ambanis, the Rais of Usha International, and those former Indians, the Hinduja's, now British but still chums of long standing with our wholly indigenous, India-born Prime Minister, a gentleman they have nursed from obscurity to Race Course Road.

There is no doubt all these redoubtable captains of industry, and their multinational friends, have made a terrible boo-boo. They grossly over-estimated the Indian market. They let themselves be taken in by DoT propaganda and finance ministry leaflets. They did not survey the real level of demand. They did not judge the real level of revenues. They did not estimate their costs correctly. Their balance-sheets, therefore, are in the red. And they want you and me to pay them for that. Why, asks Jagmohan, should we? For asking the question, he's been booted out.

The implications of what this corrupt and self-serving regime is up to boggles the mind. If we let multinationals negotiate their way out of this hole, the precedent will be set for any multinational to renege on any contract, the bigger the contract, the more assured being the prospect of negotiating their way out of the mess (subject, of course, to the usual considerations — for your personal copy of the schedule, please apply to Pramod Mahajan). The disease in cellular services will extend to V-SAT, radio-paging and finally basic services, all of which followed the licence fee model evolved initially for the cellular segment. To avoid this, a compromise was suggested: scrap the licence fee and go in for revenue-sharing but open the circle to everyone who wants to operate in it. In other words, make the monopolists in each circle end their monopoly as recompense for their not having paid their dues. This, the monopolists, all certified Believers in Competition, refused to consider. Capitalism, they patiently explained to the naive likes of Jagmohan, means having your cake and eating it too. Jagmohan had to go because he is an honest man with no links of ancient standing with prominent industrial houses like Vajpayee, Advani and Mahajan. It is the price Jagmohan has had to pay for being such a straightforward *naib tehsildar*.

He should have known his goose was cooked the day a renowned spiritual authority came to stay with one of the cellular operators and the PM, his entire family in tow, was made to wait and wait in the bare verandah before being let in at long last to pay their respects. An effective way of signalling that contracts are for tearing up, fat cats are for protecting. •

**The money involved is a cool Rs 4,500 crore, perhaps more.
Not Mahajan's. But yours. And mine**

At cross purposes

The US lobbyist firms are hurting India by helping Pakistan

Lobbyist firms, retained by the Indian government in Washington to build support for its cause in the United States and in the House of Representatives, due to crass commercial consideration are not only hurting India's interests but helping Pakistan, by default.

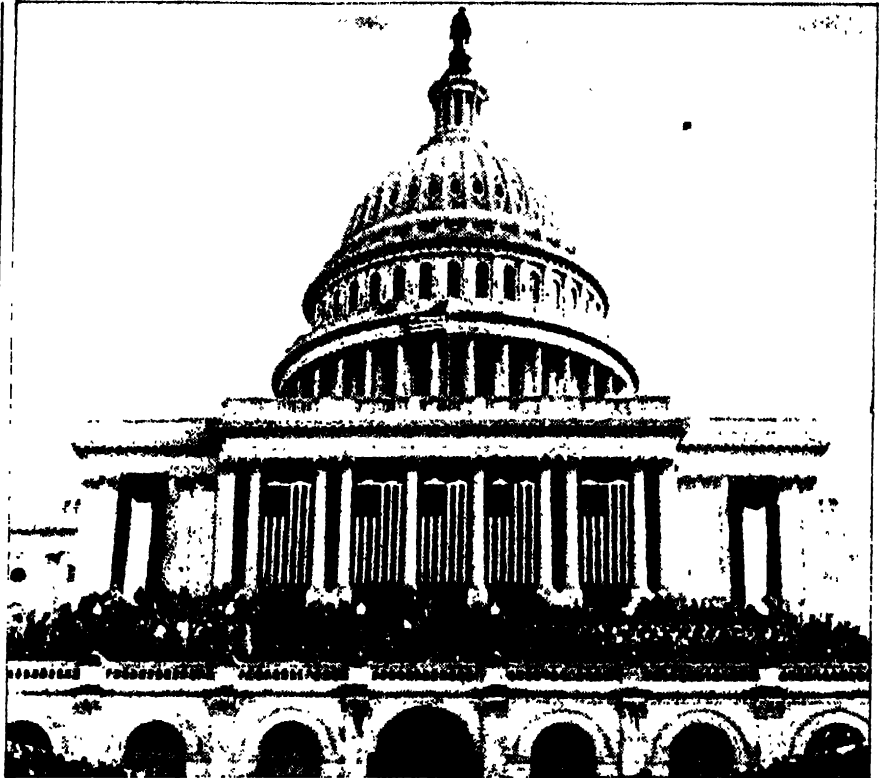
The implications of this scandalous association can be fathomed from the fact that at this juncture India is desperately trying to recover lost territory from the Pakistan-backed Afghan Mujahideen and it can ill-afford a flawed perception about her intentions in Washington. A lobbyist with ambivalent commitment could wreak havoc on New Delhi's endeavours.

India fell in the lap of these spin doctors after the US slapped sanctions on New Delhi for conducting nuclear tests in Pokhran. In response, Pakistan, too, conducted nuclear tests at Chagai and that too was meted out a similar treatment.

A lobbyist firm, Verner-Liipert-Bernhard-Mcpherson and Hand, was retained by the Indian embassy to foster greater understanding between the two countries. The purpose was to impress upon the "decision-makers and opinion-makers in the United States about India's important economic achievements and future potential".

These objectives could only be met if these "decision-makers have a detailed, correct and balanced understanding of various political issues in India today including human rights, nuclear non-proliferation and the state of affairs in various regions of the country".

The firm was expected to advise the embassy in dealing with legislation pending in the Congress that could have an adverse impact on the economic, political or diplomatic relationships between the two countries. These lobbyists, with access to confidential information, were refrained from representing any client whose "interests are in conflict with or hostile to the interests or concerns of the Government of India". If the firm chose to pick up such an account, then it was obliged to inform the Indian embassy. For these labours, the lobbyists were to



At the US Congress: the lobbyists are making a quick buck at India's expense

be paid US\$ 50,000 that included a trip to Delhi.

Besides India, this firm also had as its client Lockheed Martin Corporation, a company that has significant interests in Pakistan. Pakistan had employed a number of companies or lobbyists so that they would help to ease the sanctions against it.

Lockheed was one of them. The manufacturer of fighter aircraft and space ships had supplied a number of F-16, 'Flying Falcon' fighter aircraft to Islamabad. These aircraft, since the US-imposed sanctions following the Chagai tests, have been in a state of disuse for want of spare parts. As arms manufacturers rake in a sizeable profit by supplying spares and ammunition, Lockheed wanted the sanctions to be softened.

The lobbyists tried to kill two birds with one stone. On 16 March, 1999, Senators Helms, Brownback and others introduced a Bill in the Senate that

sought to suspend certain sanctions with respect to India and Pakistan. The Bill, dealing specifically with the replenishment of defence spares, was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

The introduction of this Bill may help India but it also helps Pakistan so that the latter can safely reactivate its F-16 fleet. According to information from Islamabad, more than nine F-16 aircraft have been grounded for want of spares.

These clandestine associations with those who are in conflict with India's national interest are not known in the South Block. "Lobbyist firms are retained by the Indian embassy in Washington," said a source in the foreign ministry.

Clearly, it never struck the officials tying up with these spin doctors that they could be pitching for a company that would also plead the case of Pakistan. ❧

Sanjay Kapoor/New Delhi



Defence minister George Fernandes paying tribute to the dead

RUPINDER SHARMA

Killing the Demons

But what if they are within us?

Indian foreign minister Jaswant Singh is not a religious man. But these days, he sleeps fitfully, wakes up with the dawn and prays — that the war might end with honour so that the boys can come home. His anger and rage at being stabbed in the back are palpable. "We put our trust in them," he says of Pakistan, his voice shaking. "Now we have to make sure the boys return home safe. We would be failing in our responsibility to India if we let the killings continue."

But everything seems to indicate that the war in Kargil will escalate and widen rather than defuse itself. This is ironic. India can't afford the war because, in an election year, body bags matter to it. Pakistan can't pay the economic costs of battle. And yet, with Pakistan foreign minister Sartaj Aziz's trip ending in such spectacular failure, winding up this war seems a distant goal.

What are the compulsions of the major actors?

The Indian Army, the fourth-largest in the world, has to show it has won the war. So, it has to recover all the territory it has lost.

For the Pak Army, the stakes are very high indeed. It has to show that it is the army which is calling the shots in

Pakistan, not the civilian leadership. So it has to prove in Pakistan that diplomacy doesn't work in relations between nations, but force does. Is Pakistan ripe for a military coup? If the civilian political leadership decides to defy the army, yes, maybe. In which case the war will intensify into a military Final Solution to Kashmir.

In Pakistan, the Jamaat-e-Islami has criticised the government for fighting a 'most useless war'. It has dubbed the Nawaz Sharif government a helpless, ineffectual entity. Goaded far enough, Sharif might respond by asserting himself and stopping the war. But only if there is no loss of face for him.

In India, there is subtle pressure to build up a case for an across-the-LoC intrusion. Either that, which will lead to a declared war, or some decisive campaign around July, which will ensure the BJP can say with pride on 15 August that they won India's territory back for it.

As stories of sorrow, pain and anger come pouring out, it seems clear that options are seriously limited. The fighting is not going to stop. And if it doesn't stop now, it never will. •

Aditi Phadnis/New Delhi

There's a war

...but only for some

"Intelligence failure," roared Mr Dhawan after consuming his fifth large *phoren* whisky (i.e., made and bottled in Scotland). "No! No~! A friend of mine in the army told me the commander of the area was incapable," said a lady and a former member of Parliament. Sandhya Chibb, a businesswoman, stubbed out her India King urgently to ensure participation in the conversation: "These army people are not as good as they're made out. I don't think we can beat Pakistan in a war."

The ex-MP butted in again: "Arrey, these chaps get all the facilities in high altitudes. They have all the fun and we think they are fighting; now the cat is out of the bag."

Dhawan interrupted, "Woh chhodo, but have you people heard of this farmhouse gig, next week..."

Were Saurav Kalia's eyes gouged out at the same time this conversation was going on in a Delhi cocktail party? Or was it a little later? Army doctors are not sure. But they know that he was tortured before he was killed. And it was an evening in May.

Twenty-two-year-old Saurav, who joined the army in December last year, was posted in Kargil—a post called Bajrang, in India's possession. He got orders to vacate the post, located at 17,000 feet, as the winters were severe and unbearable. This is a routine in these areas of Kargil and Kaksar. Saurav was a happy man, he left the rations in the bunker as they remain fresh in these temperatures and ordered his men to pack up.

Two months later, Saurav was summoned to the second-in-command of his unit (4 Jat). He was told there was information that infiltrators had entered the area. He was to go and check Bajrang. Saurav and five other soldiers left that evening for Bajrang. Since the post was not too far away from their base they reached in a few hours.

But several pairs of eyes had been following them. As the patrol approached the bunker, they were attacked and captured by Pakistani infiltrators. Bajrang had been taken—by the Pakistanis.

After two days of no news, 30 soldiers were sent to Bajrang. They were confronted by the infiltrators and in the battle that followed a Captain Bhardwaj was killed. The soldiers had to retreat and firm up at a distance. Three weeks later, Bajrang is still occupied and the body of Captain Bhardwaj is lying between Bajrang and the firm-up position of the Indian troops.

Meanwhile, Pakistan returned the bodies of Saurav and the others. Their eyes were pierced, genitals cut and scoops of flesh removed from places. After two weeks of torture, these men in uniform were shot dead. Their bodies were handed over four days later.



Though both his hands had to be amputated from the wrists, Duo-zolie

A BLOCK AWAY in the same hospital where the post mortem of these five soldiers is being done, 20-year-old Sepoy Duo-zolie Angami smiles angelically. Though both his hands had to be amputated from the wrists, he feels "proud" because "it happened while I was defending my country".

Angami grew up in the hills of Nagaland where he led a wonderfully free existence: cutting wood, hunting and playing football with friends. He went to a missionary school for some time. At 18 he joined the army and was posted in the Naga battalion.

r out there...



Angami feels proud because it happened while he was defending his country

His battalion was posted to Srinagar in March this year. "By the time our unit reached, it was April and by the first week of May we were asked to move to Dras," he said. Braving sub-zero temperatures, Angami and his colleagues reached Dras by 8 May. Barely three days into their acclimatisation programme, they were asked to go and relieve a company on one of the posts.

Angami said: "We were told to be careful as some information had come in about some Pakistani infiltrators in our territory."

Alfa company of the Naga battalion, to which Angami belonged, left Dras at 4 in the morning. They left early as an arduous climb of 8 km lay before them and every few metres "we felt just too tired to continue". These *jawans* carry their rifles, ammunition and water along with them. The weight of this *pitthu* (as it is called) is 25 to 30 kg. At a certain point of the climb, around 10 am, they stopped for rest and a drink of water. Angami and his buddy, Nicholas, just fell on the snow around them.

"There was no sign of a single Pakistani till then and I was convinced the information was wrong, but the orders were to reach a specific post at 18,050 feet by noon and relieve them. So that they can start their journey back and reach the base in time," said Angami.

But Angami and his entire company did not realise they had walked into a trap. As the tired *jawans* lay resting, there was a sudden spurt of gunfire from all directions. Angami woke up with a jerk, held his rifle, spotted a place to take cover and began to nudge Nicholas who had not moved. A nervous Angami began to shake him desperately. Angami turned around—Nicholas was dead.

Angami rushed to take cover behind a rock but he was a trifle late. "The enemy had spotted me. Being at a height, far beyond my range, I was a sitting duck."

He took the barrage from the machine gun on his hands. Today, the country has laden him with honours but he has no hands to receive them. But he has no regrets either. "*Desh ke liye duty tha aur usme goli laga to kya hua?*"

WHILE ANGAMI FORCES a smile, an older counterpart pats his back to encourage him. He is Havaladar Salim Moham-

med of the Grenadiers. "*Bhaiyya, ye Dras-Kargil waale ilake mein to kabhi kuch nahin hota tha, aur hamne bhi kabhi zyada gaur nahin kiya, ab bhugat rahein hain,*" he said.

Posted in the Dras sector, 40-year-old Salim's company was guarding post number 5165, about an hour from Dras. Their role was to defend the post and keep a watch on the Pakistani post on the other side of the LoC. Around 14 May, there were confirmed reports of infiltrators in the area. According to Salim, more forces had been sent to the area to fight the intruders. "Our task was to continue defending the post but



Chief of Army Staff General V.P. Malik's wife talks to an injured soldier

were told to fire on the Pakistanis if they showed any movement."

On 16 May, the Pakistani artillery started giving support fire to the infiltrators. "It now became urgent for us to open fire from our defence positions as our artillery hadn't moved up and our offensive needed some support," said Salim. So they started firing on the enemy posts. But for how long? Pakistani artillery was well-positioned and well-prepared. Reminiscing those moments, Salim says, "*Kuch hi ghanton mein arty ka gola hamare post par gira.*" He shows his plastered hand, which is a result of the artillery shelling that day.

It appears from the account of these soldiers that the first few days of the Kargil campaign were like walking into a cave and later realising it was a dragon's mouth. In the absence of any accurate information about the number of infiltrators, each time an army patrol went it was walking into a well-laid trap.

Lt. Debanjan Bhattacharya, of Salim's unit, led one of the first patrols in the Dras area on 8 May. The patrol was sent to check the presence of infiltrators and ascertain their numbers, capability and the degree of threat. He started with 14 soldiers in the evening around 5 pm. A night patrol was considered to be a safer bet. The other side was, however, better prepared. Around 10 pm, the patrol radioed they had been ambushed, after which no information was received. In the ensuing battle which lasted over two hours, the patrol was completely outnumbered and had to retreat. But not before four of the soldiers gave up their lives fighting for the country.

Lt. Bhattacharya did return the next morning with the remaining soldiers. But 'Bhatta', as his friends called him, had to



Havaladar Japender Nath has lost vision permanently in one eye, though doctors say they might be able to save the other one

leave again after a week. He is yet to return from that patrol. The army has declared him missing.

IF THE IMPRESSION is that India caught the infiltrators just in time then it should be dispelled. The Pakistani infiltrators had ensured the entry of the Afghan Mujahideen into Srinagar and one can't be sure how many have entered the mainland.



A jawan who lost his right leg

It appears from the account of these soldiers that the first few days of the Kargil campaign were like walking into a cave and later realising it was a dragon's mouth

As early as 19 May, Afghan militants were brought into India by slain militant Altaf Mir's brother.

On 18 May, a local informer told the army that some Mujahideen were hiding in Shiroma village, near Srinagar. By then, the army had alerted itself to infiltration in the Kargil-Dras area. So a platoon of the Mechanised Infantry unit based in Srinagar was sent, acting on this tip-off.

But the informer was part of a larger plot. As the platoon approached Naushera, a village before Shimora, they had walked into a trap. Naushera was alive with landmines. The unsuspecting platoon commander, Maj. Ajay Kumar stepped on the first mine. He was thrown up a few metres and his body torn into smithereens. Four others met the same fate. The mine killed six civilians too. Havaldar Japender Nath, who revealed the story to SUNDAY, was among the survivors. He hasn't got off lightly though — he has lost vision permanently in one eye, though doctors say they might be able to save the other

one. His face is disfigured but the doctors have done some cosmetic surgery on it and about his left leg he says, "*Mere ghutne se le kar neeche tak, koi haddi nahin hai, doctor ne kaha hai rod lagega.*"

Kulwinder Singh and Balwinder Singh of 8 Sikh were part of the company which went to secure post no. 4460 in the Tiger Hills, near Kargil. "They let us come into a position where we were surrounded by mountains on three sides. Then they opened fire from all three sides," said Kulwinder. Without any artillery back-up, it was difficult. According to Balwinder, "Our fire could not even reach them."

Yet in these difficult conditions, no offensive launched by the Pakistani army was successful. The Indian Army held on to its positions after discovering the presence of armed infiltrators. This gave enough time for reinforcements to be rushed in and artillery guns to be deployed. It was because of the bravery of these soldiers who bore the brunt of the attack initially, that today India can manoeuvre itself to an advantageous position.

As guns boom on the border, for much of the nation it is business as usual. Life goes on and the army wouldn't have it any other way. Those who are fighting are content, for this is what they do best. Those who are partying are also content, for this comes to them easily.

Only those who have lost fathers, sons, brothers and husbands, who wake up screaming at night, can't understand the senselessness of it all. They want, so badly, to feel angry. But all they feel is pain. •

Pranab Dhal Samanta/New Delhi

Pak perfidy

Shouldn't we have foreseen and forestalled the easily-anticipatable gameplan of Islamabad?

Of the painful lessons of the country's predicament in the Kargil war zone, the most important can be driven home only by underlining the bitter truth that has by now become a cliché: those who fail to learn from history are condemned to repeat it. And this kind of history, let it be added, never repeats itself as a farce; almost always as a tragedy, as we are discovering to our dismay on the bleak, brazenly-violated heights stretching from Dras to Batalik.

No wonder there is nationwide outrage over Pakistani perfidy and "betrayal" (the latter expression is Atal Behari Vajpayee's), which is magnified manifold by the Pakistani Army's bestiality in torturing Indian soldiers in its captivity and then returning their badly mutilated bodies. Neither the army of Pakistan nor the Pakistani state that enables the military to not only to behave savagely but also to dominate the entire system and society can any longer be called civilised.

However, while all this is true, is it enough for us to behave with an injured sense of anger and resolve not to rest until the last of the Pakistani invaders, both regular soldiers and mercenaries of Afghani vintage, are either driven out or killed? Shouldn't we have foreseen and

forestalled the easily-anticipatable gameplan of Islamabad? Where an ounce of preventive action might have sufficed, tons of punitive measures have become necessary, involving very heavy cost in blood to the officers and men of the armed forces.

At this juncture, it is legitimate to expect that rather than getting involved in an acrimonious inquiry into who blundered and why, we should concentrate on defeating the enemy who has had the effrontery to violate the Line of Control (LoC) in a sector of the highest strategic importance. But this cannot blind us to the stark reality that there has been not only a "massive failure" of intelligence but also crass negligence by top policy-makers, political, bureaucratic and military, who never had time to sit together and speculate what the next move of Pakistan might be after the decade-long proxy war in Jammu and Kashmir had been contained. To cap it all, the National Security Council (NSC), formed with much fanfare last November, did not meet even once until two weeks after the battle in the Kargil region had begun.

THE QUESTION NOW is whether after having dealt with the Pakistani invaders — and this will take a lot of time — we



The nationwide outrage over Pakistani "betrayal" was magnified manifold by the Pakistani Army's bestiality in torturing Indian soldiers in its captivity and then returning their mutilated bodies. Neither the Pak Army nor the Pakistani state that enables the military to not only to behave savagely but also to dominate the entire system and society can any longer be called civilised



Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee in Kargil

will revert to business as usual. This is not a rhetorical and irrelevant query. It is, in some respects, the heart of the matter. What we have allowed to happen in a sector that overlooks the lifeline between Kashmir and Ladakh and has implications for our position on the Siachen glacier is far worse than anything of this kind in the past. The Chinese built a road in Aksai Chin, and we learnt of it from a Chinese magazine and from Beijing's invitations for the road's opening. Our imbecilic response was to protest to the Chinese that their road-builders had "entered Indian territory without valid visas".

Five years later, after the Galwan post in Ladakh had been surrounded by the Chinese but not demolished, we concluded that while there might be skirmishes and patrol-level clashes, the Chinese would do "nothing big", and that a major war between India and China would inevitably involve other powers coming in to India's rescue. The thought that Mao and his military leaders would launch a sharp but carefully-calibrated limited action did not occur to anyone. Not even to Jawaharlal Nehru, for which he was rightly pilloried by, among others, a young, up-and-coming MP named Atal Behari.

Today there is much wringing of hands that preparations for the Kargil outrage were taking place at the precise moment when Nawaz Sharif and Vajpayee were embracing each other at Lahore. But, pray, how is this different from the equally deceitful sequence in 1965? Then Pakistan had floated a trial balloon in Kutch. The fighting there was ended, amidst wide applause, as a result of an agreement, promoted by Harold Wilson, then Prime Minister of Britain. The accord was signed by two brothers-in-law, Azim Hussain for India and

Arshad Hussain for Pakistan. I nicknamed it the "Husseiniwalla Pact", the reference being to a spot in the Sutlej where firing used to be exchanged frequently then. Only a few days later started the Pak army-led infiltrations of irregulars that led to the 1965 war. The pattern was much the same in December 1989 when the proxy war in Kashmir began immediately after V.P. Singh had come to power and had made Mufti Sayeed, a Kashmiri, his home minister.

On each of these occasions, be it noted, the Pakistani calculation was that the government in New Delhi was weak and vacillating. Having succeeded in their nefarious gameplan in Kargil, the Pakistanis, especially the military, were bucked up by the fact that the Vajpayee government had been reduced to being a caretaker one. But, as in Shastri's time, so now, they did encounter sharp and decisive action. Air power has been used

though, so far, only on our side of the LoC and no Pakistani can be in any doubt that the effrontery in Kargil will under no circumstances be tolerated.

The message to Sartaj Aziz was as clear as it was cold. He was tersely told that bleating about "defusing" the tension was meaningless until the violation of the LoC was undone. Remarkably, Aziz had arrived in Delhi after a sudden dash to Beijing to consult with

BEFORE TRYING TO fathom the likely scenario, it is necessary to devote attention to a supremely important question: what is wrong with our Pakistan policy that we unfailingly get into trouble? The source of trouble is a fundamental contradiction which we cannot resolve easily or quickly and from which there is no escape.

On the one hand, India and Pakistan cannot be enemies for ever. At some

sifying pressure on Kashmir and some day they will succeed.

Furthermore, the refusal of the international community to intervene in Kashmir, despite desperate efforts by Pakistanis, is a sore point with them. But their resolve to go on fighting is reinforced by several other factors. An important one of these is the galloping Islamisation of Pakistan, especially of the Pak Army, from the days of Zia. This, combined with the vow of many, including the hot-heads in the armed forces, to "avenge" the liberation of Bangladesh, becomes a potent force. To this must be added the Nuclear Factor. Even at a time when the Pakistani nuclear programme was covert and in its initial stages, generals at the GHQ used to boast that nuclear weapons would not only paralyse the Indian nuclear might but also deprive India of the advantages of its conventional superiority. Under these circumstances, it was felt that Pakistan could either wrest Kashmir or at least internationalise it yet again through a "bold and brash" military action.

QUITE CLEARLY, THE Kargil misadventure was born of this fantasy. It hasn't worked the way its planners expected it to. But, from the Pakistani point of view, it hasn't totally failed yet. That was evident during Sartaj Aziz's futile mission to Delhi which was staged solely to impress the outside world that



An Indian contingent at the front

AFP

Pakistan's traditional and dependable ally. From all accounts, Aziz got no great comfort from his Chinese hosts. Unlike other major powers, they did not publicly embarrass Pakistan by demanding that the LoC be respected. But they did not bail Islamabad out of the mess of its own creation. They insisted on the matter being settled by peaceful, bilateral talks. Other countries, most notably the United States, have been more forthright on the LoC's sanctity. However, even they have been much milder in their public utterances than in their private remonstrance with Pakistan.

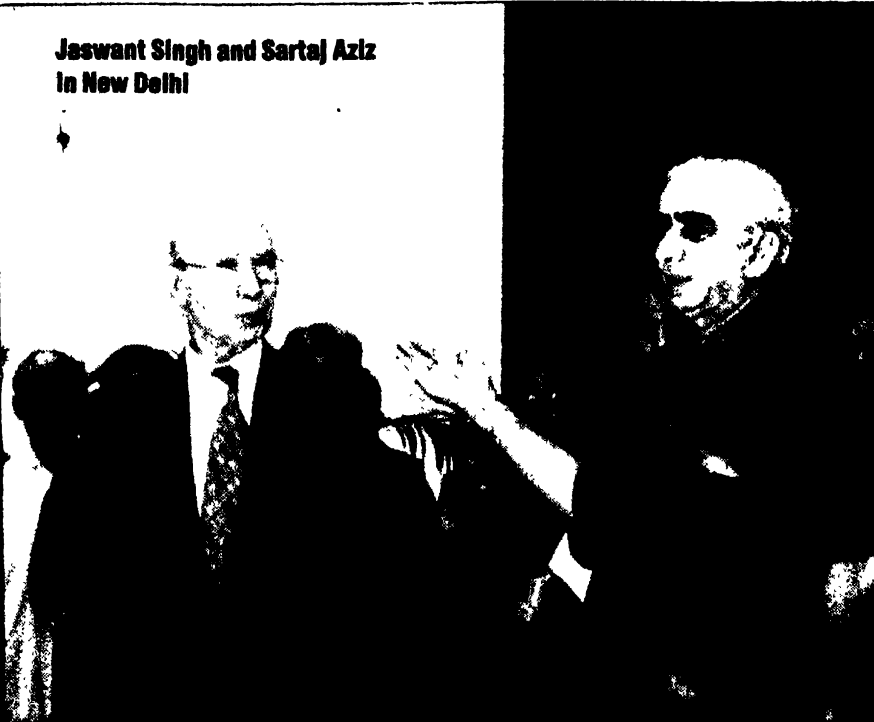
As I write this, our foreign minister, Jaswant Singh, is on his way to China. A better appreciation of Beijing's view of the situation will be available only after his return home. But it is reasonable to conclude that in devising their response to the failure of the Aziz mission, decision-makers in Islamabad will have to reckon with their country's diplomatic isolation.

stage, the two countries, born of the same civilisation and with much in common, will learn to live in peace, harmony and hopefully cooperation. On the other hand, in spite of an undoubted expansion of the "peace lobby" in that country, as in this one, Pakistan's hostility towards India is so profound that the deeply-entrenched military-bureaucratic-feudal combination can always subvert or defeat any project to improve Indo-Pak relations.

Having watched the ups and downs of the India-Pakistan discourse since the Nehru-Noon Pact (on the treatment of minorities in East Pakistan) in 1950, it is my conviction that most Indians, especially those on the Delhi-Islamabad seminar circuit, woefully underestimate the Pakistani sentiment in Kashmir. Despite the failure of their repeated attempts to wrest Kashmir by force or even by a combination of force and Pakistan-backed insurgency by disaffected Kashmiris for which Delhi is culpable, Pakistanis believe that they have got to go on inten-



Jaswant Singh and Sartaj Aziz
in New Delhi



V. RAJAGOPAL

Islamabad was keen to "defuse" the tension. Most countries continue to blame Pakistan for violating the LoC and are demanding that the line be respected. However, some in Pakistan might be drawing some comfort from the recent statement of the German foreign minister about the concern of the G-8. This

rich nations' club is holding its summit meeting on 18 June.

Pakistan now has three choices. It can quietly allow the invaders to withdraw and hope to perpetrate some other provocation later that could be more successful. Or, it could let the aggressors squatt- ing on Indian territory to be annihilated

HUPINDER SHARMA



Soldiers paying last respects
to their dead colleagues

Sartaj Aziz was tersely told that bleating about "defusing" the tension was meaningless until the violation of the LoC was undone.

Remarkably, Aziz had arrived in Delhi after a sudden dash to Beijing to consult with Pakistan's traditional and dependable ally. From all accounts, Aziz got no great comfort from his Chinese hosts

by this country through military action, ground and aerial, confined to the Indian side of the LoC. Since this will inevitably take time, perhaps several months, and the casualties are bound to be high, Pakistan might hope for internal dissensions, especially at election time. Or Pakistan could deliberately try to raise the ante in the Kargil-Siachen sector, or elsewhere in Kashmir, in a desperate gamble that the heightened level of fighting between the two neighbours would at last bring about the hitherto elusive international intervention on the Kashmir issue.

The third course is the obvious one for Pakistan to adopt though it might be deterred from a reckless course for fear of adverse international reaction, because of the possibility of a military disaster as in 1965, and because of the perilous state of the Pakistani economy which cannot bear the burden of a wider war and its inevitable consequences. But then madness has reigned at the Pakistani GHQ in the past and could do so again.

It follows therefore that if this country does not wish to fall in the Pakistani trap, it will have to be vastly more vigilant against every possible Pakistani mischief than it has shown itself to be in Kargil. Policy-makers in Delhi must learn to put themselves in the shoes of their Pakistani opposite numbers and then anticipate what they would do if they were making the decisions in Islamabad. Eternal vigilance is the price not only of liberty but also of a country's territorial integrity and security. •

Inder Malhotra/New Delhi

Remembering K

A soldier's diary

In my time (1972-75) in the Kargil brigade, the region was more serene and peaceful. The Pakistan Army had been given a proper hammering during the 1971 War all the way from Draz to Turtuk. Many ridge lines and much tactical ground was captured, notably the historic Point 13620 (in feet) height, Kargil's vital ground.

13620 as it is commonly called lies on the east of the Shingo river which bisects Kargil. This ridge line stretches further east up to the partially glaciated Camel's Back and from there, on to Batalik. Militarily 13620 is the heart and soul of Kargil, standing sentinel over the narrow valley, in command of all it surveys.

13620 was with Pakistan at the time of the ceasefire in 1949. Before Partition the Dogra rulers of Kashmir had their outposts right up to Gilgit-Bunji-Skardu-Kargil-Leh and further, manned mainly by Sikh and Dogra soldiers. When Pakistan regular soldiers accompanied by the Taliban of the 1947 vintage carried out their first intrusion in 1947, these garrisons fought gallantly defending these posts.

Skardu, the launch pad for the present set of intrusions, was held by a company of 6JAK Rifles, which included 75 Muslim soldiers. The Gorkha Major Sherjung Thapa defended Skardu on Gen. Thimayya's personal orders. Last Man Last Round for a full one year till the post fell after the Muslims had deserted. Most of the Sikhs were executed. Thanks to the British Commander-in-Chief of the Pakistan Army, Thapa was unharmed. He won an MVC and several other decorations in his lifetime. He died last year at the ripe old age of 93.

Similarly Col Chiwang Rinchin, MVC and Bar, the hero of Nubra Valley, was instrumental in defending Leh in 1948. In 1971, he captured Turtuk and areas in the vicinity where the fighting is going on today. Rinchin was a double MVC and also died last year. Turtuk is

outside the present intrusion zone and the eastern extremity of the present round of fighting. Turtuk is also the tough under-belly of Siachen.

13620 was wrested for the first time from Pakistan in 1964 during the Kutch intrusions. It was handed back to Pakistan after both sides agreed to pull back troops. In the 1965 War, it was recaptured and once again returned to Pakistan after the Tashkent Agreement. Brigadier V.K. Ghai won an MVC for this. In 1971 it was retaken for keeps, not just 13620 but the entire ridge up till Camel's Back and another ridgeline called Black Rocks in front of it. The 1971 victor of 13620 was Brigadier M.L. Whiq, who also won a MVC. 13620 is the most decorated pinnacle in the history of mountain warfare conferring three MVCs and scores of other decorations.

Whenver a new unit arrives at the Line of Control (LoC), Pakistani troops opposite the new arrivals, usually the Northern Light Infantry or other tribal soldiers from the northern areas, try to test their grit and resolve. In this instance they were testing India's triple Victoria Cross winning Second Five Gorkha Rifles (FF). Since Pakistan had lost considerable ground in Kargil sector since 1965 and were demoralised in the aftermath of the 1971 War, my Gorkhas were adequately respected. There was never any firing, not even in anger.

Once Pakistan attempted an encroachment on the LoC below one of our posts along the Shingo river. A few Gorkhas flashed their *khukhris* and that did the trick. On another occasion, one of the Johnnies being ferried from Black Rocks to Post 43 in a Flying Fox fell into the Shingo river and probably froze to death. The Pakistani soldiers helped in locating his body near a point where the Shingo joins the Indus.

Kargil town stands at 8,000 feet south of the Shingo. The 121 Brigade headquarters and my headquarters were separated by a single-span Bailey bridge. The Brigade Commander, my boss and veteran of the 1948 Kashmir War was an intrepid mountain walker. We had built



a golf course but could never interest him in the game though he did happily inaugurate the course. We used to play in summer on Sunday mornings. The rest of the time it was snow-skiing.

In October every year, Gorkhas celebrate Dussehra like the Germans their beer festivals. Two right-sized and right-temperament buffaloes had to be found who would be acceptable to the *panditji* and Subedar Major, but more importantly, accept becoming the sacrificial buffaloes. Some days before the ceremony, the Brigade Commander who had targeted my office (like the Pakistanis have his office, now with artillery) with his binoculars, found I was enjoying Kargil more than he was.

He called up: "Ashok, I want you to

Kargil



Guns of Kargil: Protecting point 13620

Today, the Pakistani shells have left Kargil pockmarked. Fortunately, the valour and wisdom of Kargil is enshrined in 13620 and the proud people of Kargil

Indian troops at Kargil: Facing the fire

study the ground between Draz and Batalik and give me an appreciation of the enemy threat to Kargil." He made it clear that this was to be a ground reconnaissance, not a map study.

I was ten days on my Kargil expedition and walked over and surveyed some of the very areas in which the intrusions have taken place. On the 11th day which was D-Day for Dussehra, I returned to Kargil and produced the appreciation of the situation, as on 5th October, 1973. As it was a top Secret document, it had to be hand written. My assessment: while Kargil was tactically more

important, the threat to Batalik was the most dangerous.

Lt. Gen. P.S. Bhagat, VC, who was the Northern Army Commander and had only the previous year along with Lt. Gen. Hamid Khan, delineated on the map the LoC resulting from the 1971 War, was present during the discussion on my threat paper. He was the only one who agreed with my assessment.

Behind Kargil is the Zaskar Valley where refugees from the shelling in Kargil and Draz have found shelter. In better days, scores of trekkers and mountaineers would walk along these mountain trails. In winter our patrols from Kargil went to Chorbatla through Batalik and once from Draz over Zojila to Sonamarg which is the base for the shorter route to

Amarnath. In good weather we would return to Sonamarg the same day after a *darshan* of the *lingam* in the cave and the mythological pair of pigeons outside it.

Those were happy days. The only intrusion in our time was committed by an Italian diplomat accompanied by his Peruvian girl friend. Their CD car driver tricked the Gorkha sentry on the Bailey bridge to Leh. An army Jonga chased the Mercedes. These love birds were tracked down first in Batalik, later intercepted near Nimmo, examining fossils.

Pink-cheeked Buddhist children in Nimmo would sell a bucketful of pink Nimmo apples for Re 1. We would trade apples for food but give the mandatory cash.

Twenty five years later, Pakistani shells have left Kargil pockmarked. Fortunately, the valour and wisdom of Kargil is enshrined in 13620 and the proud people of Kargil. •

Maj. Gen. Ashok K. Mehta/New Delhi



The Blueprint

It's clear that the Pak invasion of Kargil was an army show

83315 China World — the room number and the hotel where Pakistan Army Chief Parvez Musharraf stayed in Beijing while the Pakistan Army was sending troops into Kargil.

The Kargil action prompted a Pakistani brigadier to tell a colleague on the phone: "Muhajir ney phasa diya." The 'Muhajir' is Musharraf.

Here is the full story of the operational plan of the invasion of Kargil and an interpretation of the tapes.

Pakistan's invasion of Kargil has all the hallmarks of a sensitive, clandestine operation of far-reaching consequences. It was meant to be the army's realisation of the second pincer through Ladakh into J&K, the first being in Afghanistan. The two pincers seek extra strategic width for Pakistan and rely heavily on the Taliban. Sadly, the pincers are stuck — one in Badakshan, Afghanistan, the other in Kargil.

By now it is clear the aggression in Kargil was an army show, the scale and scope of the operation was unknown to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) was excluded from its planning. So, defence minister George Fernandes' seemingly objectionable comments were unexceptionable. The only mystery is why the China tapes were withheld and Fernandes made to take the flak for so long.

Thanks to China World 83315, the cat is out of the bag.

Key players

The Kargil plan, the brainwave of Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Gen. Parvez Musharraf, was hatched between him and former DG, ISI, and present Chief of General Staff (CGS) Lt.-Gen. Mohammad Aziz Khan in utmost secrecy.

Only three others were privy to the plan: Lt.-Gen. Mahmood Ahmad, GOC 10 Corps; Force Commander Northern Areas (FCNA), Maj. Gen. Javed Hassan; and the Director General Military Operations (DGMO) Lt.-Gen. Tauqif Zia.

Lt.-Gen. Zaman Zafar, GOC 11 Corps, the seniormost Corps Commander in Pakistan who officiates as Chief of Army Staff when Musharraf is touring, was kept out of it.

The surprising omission from the plans was the DG, ISI, Lt.-Gen. Ziauddin. Aziz Khan's dislike for 'Zia' as also the adversarial relationship between GHQ and ISI is common knowledge.

Parvez Musharraf was appointed COAS following the dismissal of Gen. Jahangir Karamat after superseding two other generals: Lt.-Gen. Ali Quli Khan and Lt.-Gen. Mohammad Nawaz. Being a gunner and a Muhajir, he had to prove himself — more loyal than the king and a result-oriented chief. His two tenures in the Special Services Group are etched in Musharraf's thoughts.

When the Kargil plan was ready, Prime Minister Nawaz

Sharif was merely informed that an operation to launch infiltrators through Ladakh was being mounted. Nawaz Sharif sought and received an assurance that this would not trigger a war and was no more than an infiltration operation.

Scope and plan

The operation was to be limited to the Kargil sector of Ladakh aimed at occupying dominated heights overlooking



Shell-shocked: Pakistan artillery is firing around 300 shells every day in the Kargil sector

the Srinagar-Leh road so that it could be cut off before the opening of the vital Zojila Pass linking Srinagar valley with Ladakh. Once the posts and bases were established on the Indian side of the Line of Control (LoC), the Taliban were to be pushed in across Kargil into J&K.

Force levels

Local regular troops from the Northern Light Infantry (NLI), part of FCNA, were designated to lead the intrusion force. No fresh troops were moved into the sector, only readjustments and redeployment were carried out. Approximately 1,000 troops from three NLI battalions were constituted into

four columns, each with an integral SSG team. In addition, 400 Taliban/Mujahideen were deployed as fighting porters.

Each composite column is led by a colonel and armed with automatic rifles, universal machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades, flame throwers, Stinger missiles and 12.7 mm anti-aircraft portable guns. Each column was assigned to occupy ten to 15 posts and all the main posts stocked for winter with their lines of logistics secured.

Intrusion details: an assessment

The size and strength of intrusions were only partially clear by 10 June. An estimate of intrusions sectorwise, as on 15 June, is as follows:

Sector	Strength	Posts (approximate)
Batalik	300	9
Kaksar	150	5
Dras	210	8
Mashkoh	150	7

A force of around 700 fighting porters/Taliban is held in reserve for induction. The Mujahideen claim to owe allegiance to Lashkar-e-Toiba, Harkat-ul-Ansar and Hizbul Mujahideen. Skardu is the hub of operations and headquarters of 62 PoK Brigade. The forward bases opposite Kargil are Gultari, Shagma and Olthingtang. These are the ones feeding the intrusions.

These intrusions are supported by surface-to-air missiles, artillery and heavy mortars. In each of these four intrusions, six to eight Stingers are available. Pakistan artillery is firing around 300 shells every day in the Kargil sector. This does not include the unit mortars.

Time-plan

The planning for Kargil started in November 1998. Troops were moved forward into deployment areas by 25 March. The actual intrusions began around 15 April and were to have been completed and consolidated by 20 May, that is, at least three weeks before the opening of the Zojila Pass.

Indian Army sappers forced open the pass before 15 May and this put the intrusion plan out of gear.

Surprise and secrecy

So vital was secrecy to the success of this operation that plans and information were given on a need-to-know basis. A ban was placed on movement of troops in and out of FCNA. Even the redeployment within the sector was carried out at night. The radio nets were not activated till the air strikes had begun. Most importantly, the ISI was brought into the game only at the implementation stage. The exclusion of Ziauddin has to do with Aziz Khan's utter contempt for him.

The tapes

The China Tapes and allied intelligence reports reveal



Nawaz Sharif: Kargil was an exclusive army plan, shared in outline with the PM, but the ISI kept out till the execution stage

and confirm:

■ The planning for Kargil started as soon as Parvez Musharraf became COAS last year.

■ The invasion was disguised as an indigenous Mujahideen operation.

■ The Indian response was to be depicted as attacks on Pakistani posts, logistic build-up and bases on the LoC. The aircraft bombs being dropped on the Indian side were to be shown as landing on the Pak side of the LoC.

■ Secrecy was the most vital element of this operation. The eight other Corps Commanders who formed the power structure



AFP

re were informed of the operation as late as 20 May.

■ Nawaz Sharif's first full briefing was done when its chief architect Parvez Musharraf was still in Beijing. The CGS ensured that the DG, ISI, was marginalised at this briefing.

■ It was emphasised there was no fear of war as the militants who were upfront in the intrusions were under army control and could be withdrawn any time. The CGS also said the situation was developing as per Pakistan Army assessment, which it could handle.

■ The air bombing was helping Pakistan to internationalise J&K. At the same time, the army has acknowledged that it represents a strong message on its willingness to use force by India to evict the intrusion.

■ The door for dialogue is open but foreign minister Sartaj Aziz should not discuss the ground situation or ceasefire as this would allow the convoys to move along the Srinagar-Leh

highway.

■ In the negotiations, Pakistan's stance should focus on discrepancies on the LoC and the posts they had occupied now without attacking them ought to be shown as posts being held by them for a long time.

It is abundantly clear Kargil was an exclusive army plan, shared in outline with Nawaz Sharif but the ISI kept out till the execution stage, due to the differences between the CGS and the DG, ISI, both experts on Talibanisation.

Beena Sarwar, the editor of *The Times on Sunday* in Pakistan, has said that in Pakistan too, there is talk that the Kargil attacks were army-initiated.

The aggression has exposed the treachery of the Pak political establishment, isolated it diplomatically and internationally—and rewritten the unspoken truth that the army is an autonomous player in Pakistan. Once again, the hardliners in the Pakistan Army have made their government look silly. •

Maj. Gen. Ashok K. Mehta/New Delhi

The intellectual

But why don't others recognise I.K. Gujral's statesman-like qualities?

As politicians go, Inder Kumar Gujral has had a spectacularly successful career. He started out as a refugee from Pakistan, became a personage in Delhi's municipal circles, became Indira Gandhi's information minister, was sent to the USSR as ambassador at just the right time to make it look as if he was being punished for standing up to Sanjay Gandhi, joined the campaign against the Emergency and became a Janata Party leader.

Things were fine so long as the Janata Party was in power. But when Indira Gandhi came back to power in 1980, a whole lot of Opposition politicians found themselves out of business. Many could have spoken if they had wanted to.

The communalisation of Punjab and Assam was on with ruthless efficiency. In Assam as in Punjab, the Congress was running with the hare and hunting with the hounds. But there were many in the Opposition who kept quiet and watched: some in despair, some out of weakness, some who just felt it was politic not to speak.

Gujral kept a low profile during this time. He could have been critical of the Sikh fundamentalists. He should have attacked the Congress's duplicity. He could have banded the Hindus of Punjab together to prevent their communalisation. But if he did all this, it was softly, within the safe environs of the India International Centre. The *Punjab Kesri* has noted that among all the Hindu leaders of Punjab, I.K. Gujral never visited his home state even once when the fighting was going on.

In 1984, when Indira Gandhi was shot dead by her Sikh bodyguards and pogroms were unleashed against the

Sikhs of India, it was George Fernandes who organised committees to provide relief to the hunted. If Gujral spoke up during this time, no one remembers.

In the late Eighties, when V.P. Singh became the self-proclaimed messiah of the Janata Dal and Chandra Shekhar was humiliated and driven out of JD, Gujral seized upon the moment. If anything, Shekhar and Gujral had known each other much longer, from the days of the Congress and the Emergency. But old friendships counted for little. Gujral eagerly joined the band of those who vilified Shekhar. Now the target of that vilification is another old friend, George Fernandes.

Whatever else he may be, Gujral is a master strategist. His policy, of never leading an attack against anything or anyone, always following others' campaigns, made him a safe ally and an inconsequential enemy.

When V.P. Singh made him foreign minister in 1989, Gujral's cup spilled over. He was back at what he thought he was best at. The Nepal monarchy collapsed and with that, Singh's government, depriving Gujral of the chance of claiming that he had been responsible for the revolution in Nepal.

Gujral is a master strategist. His policy, of never leading an attack against anything or anyone, always following others' campaigns, made him a safe ally and an inconsequential enemy

When Chandra Shekhar formed a government with Rajiv Gandhi and the Congress's help, Gujral added his voice to the general clamour that Chandra Shekhar had sold out and it was a defeat for all that was decent in politics. Less than five years later, Gujral himself accepted help from the Congress in much the same circumstances.

Then he got to play a role again: H.D. Deve Gowda became Prime Minister, the eighth choice of a weak coalition. It didn't matter to Gujral, he was foreign minister, jetting all round the world, solving the problems of the Algerians, the Mongolians and the ethnic minorities in Burkina Faso.

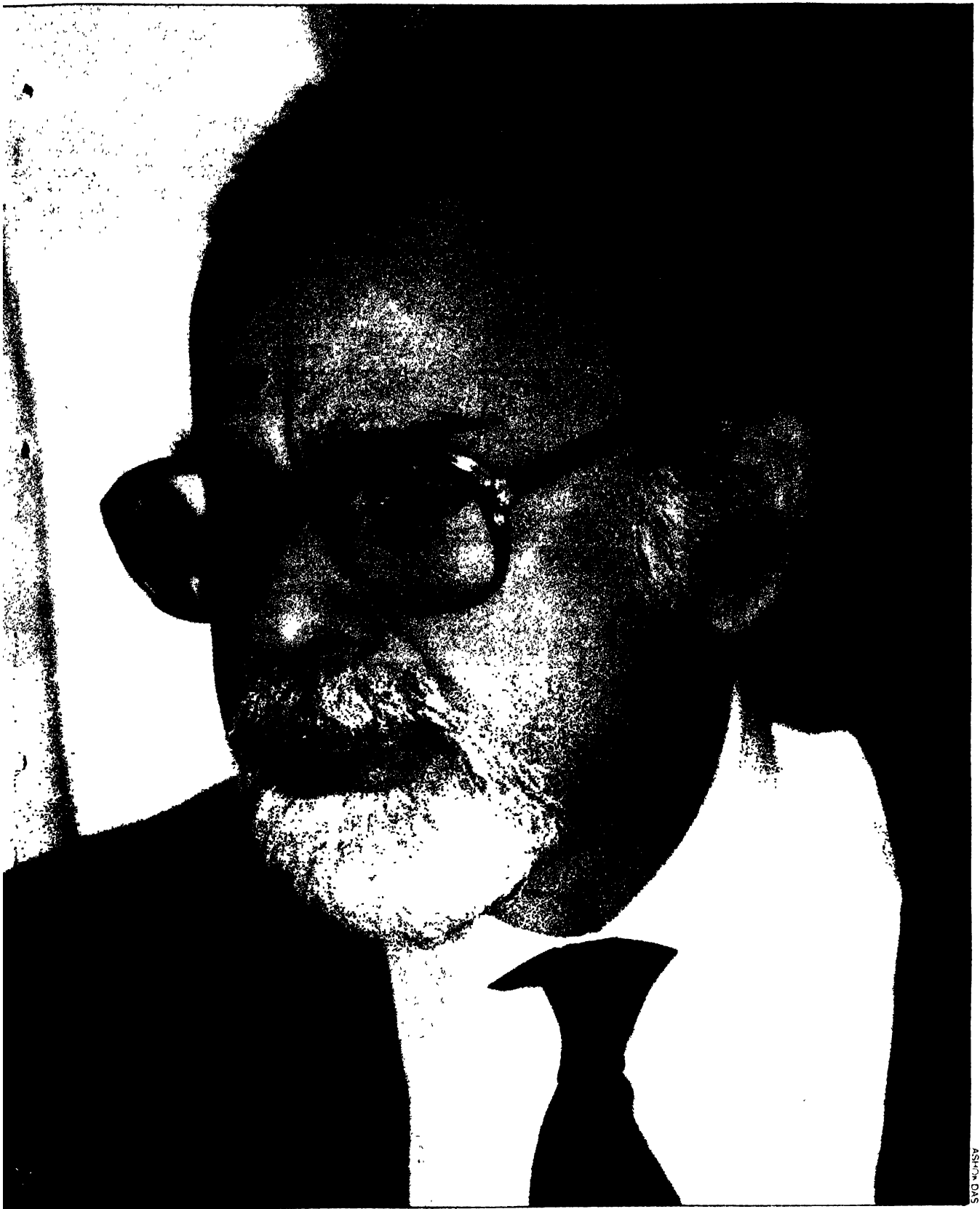
And then the heavens burst. The Congress got tired of Deve Gowda, decided to dump him and announced that they wanted someone as PM who would embody the triumph of style over substance. Who better than Gujral.

It took Gujral a long time to get used to the idea that he was PM now, and didn't need to take directions from anyone. Like the poor relative, used to cast-offs, jealously guarding a minuscule empire, Gujral didn't appoint a foreign minister and continued with his foreign policy coups: the Gujral doctrine, i.e., the hand of friendship to all India's neighbours, Old Friends of Gujral (unkindly referred to as Old Fogies) flattered, cajoled and bullied their way into appointments as high commissioners and ambassadors.

And then the Jain Commission and the fall of the Gujral government led to another election. This time Gujral was determined to come back to Parliament. When the BJP offered support to him for the Jalandhar seat he gladly accepted it. He also sought and got help from the Akali Dal. This was of course, all for the secular cause. But when it came to voting and Atal Behari Vajpayee asked him for his support in the vote of confidence, he refused. It will be the defeat of all that I've always stood for, he said smugly.

Now it is Fernandes's scalp that Gujral wants. Hope springs eternal in the ex-Prime Minister's breast that if the leading lights of the BJP government are finished, there may yet be a chance for him. After all there's nothing in the Constitution that prevents an ex-Prime Minister from becoming the foreign minister again.

We all live in hope. •



ASHOK DAS

At last!

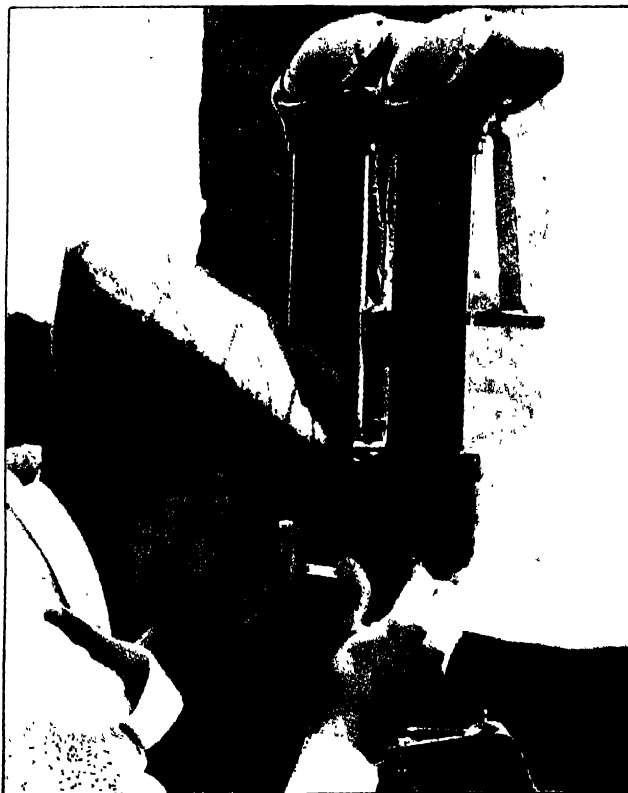
The National Security Council meets to discuss Kargil



Thank God for small mercies. Nearly seven months after it was first formed, the National Security Council (NSC) had its first meeting on 8 June. In some respects, it was a rather unusual start but this was perhaps inevitable, given the persistence of the Kargil outrage and the then impending visit of the Pakistani foreign minister Sartaj Aziz. All

the members of the rather large National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) were invited. But in the case of the unwieldy Strategic Planning Group (SPG), most members were kept out; only the "core" secretaries, those of defence, foreign affairs, home and finance and the Cabinet secretary were invited.

All the members of the Cabinet Committee on National Security were, of course, present. However, the Prime Minister as NSC chairman, and his ministerial colleagues as well as official advisers listened rather than talked.



Did it occur to no one that having been thwarted in its decade-long proxy war in the Kashmir Valley, the Pakistanis would try some provocation elsewhere?

The extended meeting of the council decided that while the Pakistani invasion must be obliterated firmly and as fast as possible, this country should remain committed to the "composite dialogue" and must make all efforts to prevent the Lahore spirit from evaporating completely.

In the midst of the operations in the Kargil, Dras and Batalik sector where our gallant *jawans* and their dedicated officers, leading them from upfront, are paying a very heavy price in blood, the conclusion reached by NSC may seem odd to some. But it is sound as well as sensible. After all, the path of peaceful dialogue had to be followed after every armed conflict in the past, whether it ended indecisively, as in 1965, or in a strategic victory of this country, as in 1971.

An inevitable consequence of the resolve not to cross the LoC is likely to be that the operations against the invaders in the Kargil region are bound to be prolonged and painful. In this context, a member of the NSAB, N.N. Vohra, who has been defence secretary, home secretary and principal secretary to the Prime Minister, drew attention to the likely repercussions of heavy casualties over a long period.

It was in this context that several of those present endorsed the idea of summoning a special session of the Rajya Sabha to consolidate and demonstrate to the world at large national support to the policy of driving out or decimating the aggressors. But the PM's reluctance to accept the idea was clear enough. Thereupon some other members, principally K. Subrahmanyam, convenor of NSAB, suggested the appointment of a coordination committee of leaders of all major parties so that they could be briefed at regular and frequent intervals. Atal Behari Vajpayee seemed more receptive to this proposal though a formal move has yet to be made.

Two other useful lines of action also came up for discussion. Given the overriding importance of a sound economy and in view of the utterly precarious economic plight of Pakistan, it was suggested that international economic pressure on Pakistan can and should be intensified. Apparently, this is being done. The idea came from Sanjay Baru.

The second extremely important issue was raised by eminent scientists like Raja Ramanna and R. Narasimhan. They pointed out that technology for detecting infiltrations and incursions in even impenetrable terrains had developed to a very high degree, and should be made use of.

It would be unfair to blame only those guarding the frontiers for their inadequacies. What the devil were higher policy-makers in Delhi doing? Did it occur to no one that having been thwarted in its decade-long proxy war in the Kashmir Valley, the Pakistanis would try some provocation elsewhere? Had anyone in the government or NSC asked such questions, thoughts might have turned to Kargil. At K. Subrahmanyam's suggestion, the idea of an almost daily exercise in "advance thinking" has been accepted. Indeed, he and the National Security Adviser Brajesh Mishra have been asked to get on with this task. •



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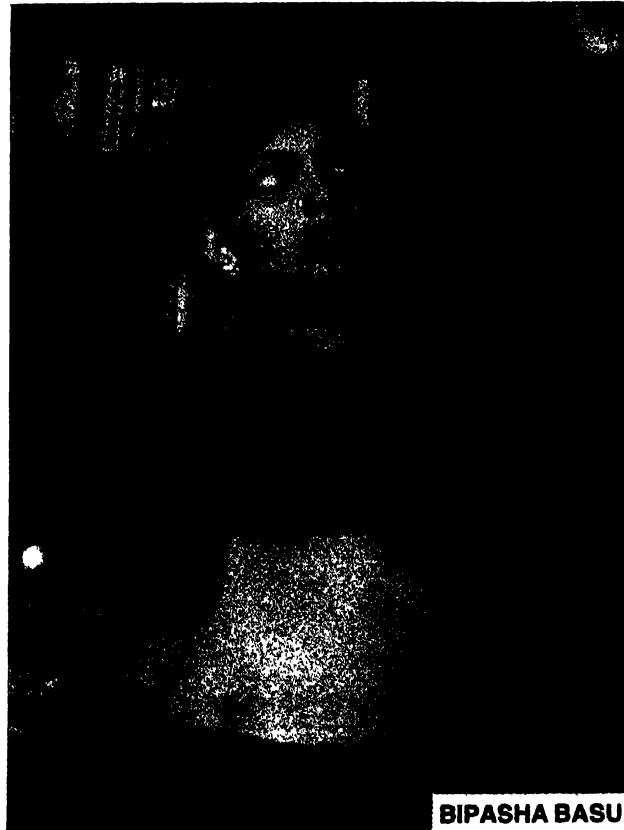
UTPAL SORKAR

RINKE KHANNA



For once, the lead pair of a movie are not being linked to one another in the run-up to the release of their debut vehicle. Yes, we're talking about Rinke Khanna and Dino Morea, who play the lead roles in *Pyar Mein Kabhi Kabhi*.

One reason for this could be that Dino is very much — and very publicly — in love with model Bipasha Basu. And nobody would be very convinced if rumours began flying of his liaison with



BIPASHA BASU

Rinke. And the other is that Rinke too is involved with somebody else: Sanjay Suri, the other hero of her debut movie. The two have been spotted together far too often

to qualify as mere good friends. But nobody is too sure if this is just a location romance, which will fizzle out as soon as the movie is in the theatres.

every movie of his flopping badly. And even when his films have done well, the credit has gone to someone else (think *Raja* and Madhuri Dixit).

So, now Sanjay has decided that *Sirf Tum*, his latest release, is going to be his last bid for stardom. He has announced that he will abandon the idea of acting and turn to direction instead if this film bombs at the box-office as well.

Kapoor is not leaving things to chance, though. Instead, he is using every platform he can get — from television, live appearances to print interviews — to beg, cajole, plead with people to see his film. This is his very last chance, you see.

The entire country in general, and the armed forces in particular, may be bearing the brunt of the Pakistani misadventure in Kargil, but it has proved lucky for one man: the producer of *Sarfurosh*.

The movie — which deals with Pakistani gun-running in India — was doing well to begin with, but ever since the events in Kargil, it has been raking it in. Clearly, patriotic fervour is bringing more and more people in to see this film — and the producer is laughing all the way to the bank. •

SUSMITA SEN



Talking of *Sirf Tum*, it looks as if Susmita Sen is going to get a new lease of life in the movies. She has already had a hit — even if she had to share it with half a dozen others — in *Biwi No. 1* and she is looking great and performing well in *Sirf Tum* as well.

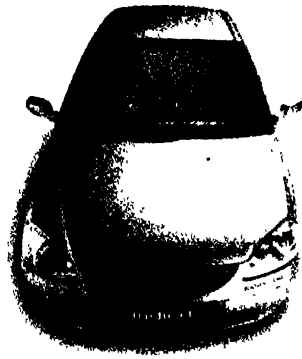
It looks as if the only thing holding Sush back was her involvement with Vikram Bhatt. Now that she has broken up with him, her career is once again going great guns.

In all, it seems like a fair exchange. After all, a couple of big hits are better than a loving live-in relationship any day. Right, Sush?

Sanjay Kapoor is getting very, very desperate — and frankly, who can blame him? The man has had the damndest luck at the box-office, with nearly

SANJAY KAPOOR





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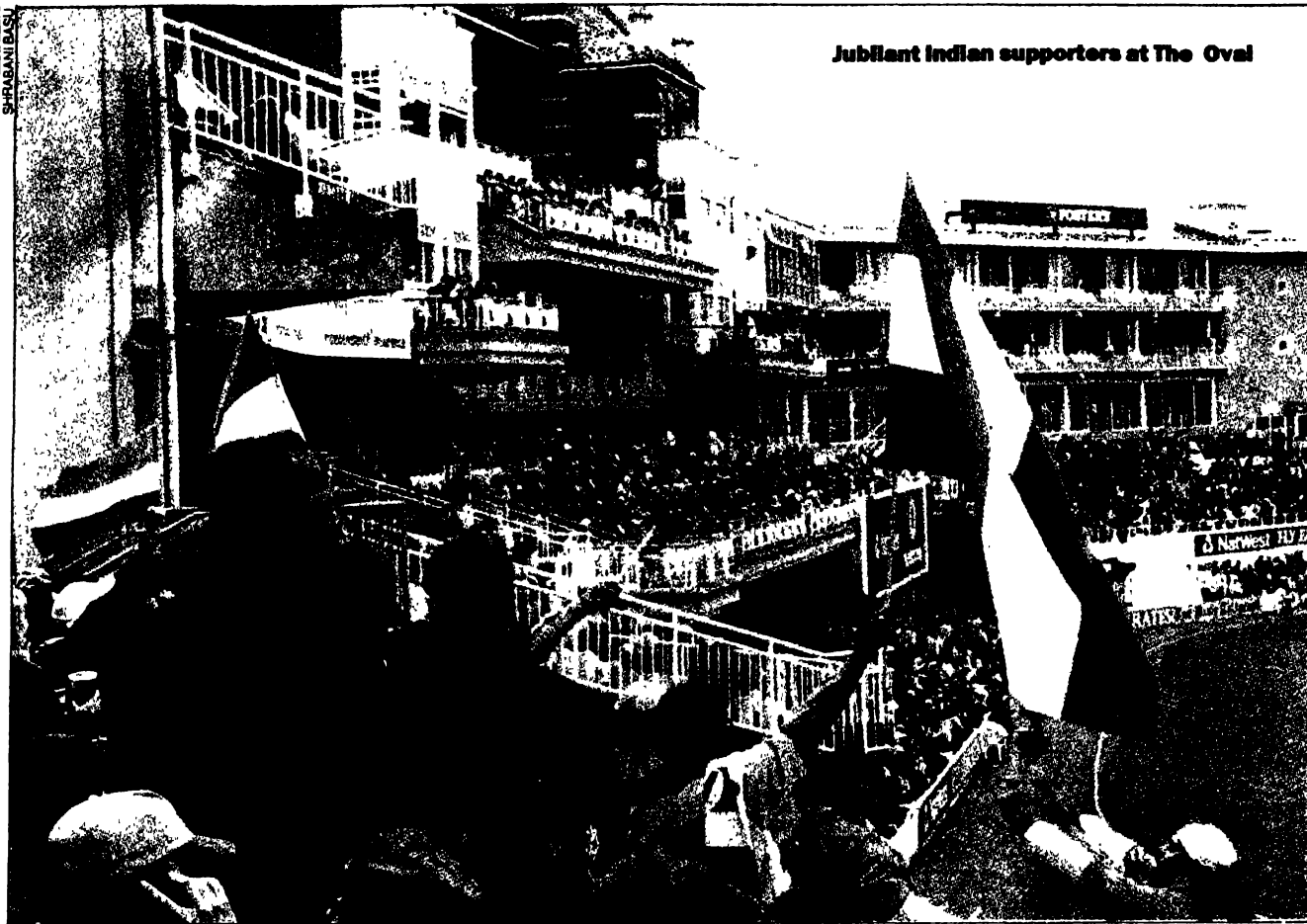
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Jubilant Indian supporters at The Oval



INDIAN SUMMER

John Major had once described Middle England as a land of warm beers, leisurely cricket on green pitches and old ladies cycling in the common. But that was before Cricket World Cup '99, where England's green and pleasant pitches suddenly felt the heat of the sub-continent rather than the gentle drizzle of an English summer.

That cricket is alive in Britain, even though it may only be because of the sub-continent, was proved beyond doubt as the Indians arrived in full force. They came from London, Birmingham and Manchester. Some have travelled all the way from India and Canada. The cricket season was in full swing. The stadiums were a riot of colour — saffron, green and white — the Indian flag fluttered high and fans dressed for the matches

*Fans from the
subcontinent take over
English cricket
grounds in the spirit of
a carnival*

with full gusto, in hats, wigs, painted faces and India team shirts.

India matches were the first to be sold out in the World Cup, some tickets were sold as early as last year. When it came to the smaller cricket grounds like Hove and Bristol, with capacities of 5,000 and 6,000, organisers felt they could have sold three times the number of tickets. The England and Wales Cricket Board

(ECB) had built it as a carnival of cricket but the only ones making the music were fans from the subcontinent.

And party they did with spirit. The *samosas*, *bhajis* and chicken tikkas flowed freely, the drums and gongs were beaten and slogans chanted till the fans were blue in the face. With India entering the Super Six after a nail-biting match against England, the temperature kept rising. At the first Super Six encounter between India and Australia at The Oval, the fans even started recognising each other from previous matches. Hitesh Patel and his mates had arrived at The Oval after seeing India playing at Hove, Taunton and Edgbaston.

"The minute we realised India had entered the Super Six, we called the number at 9 am as soon as the lines opened and got our tickets," said Patel, a com-



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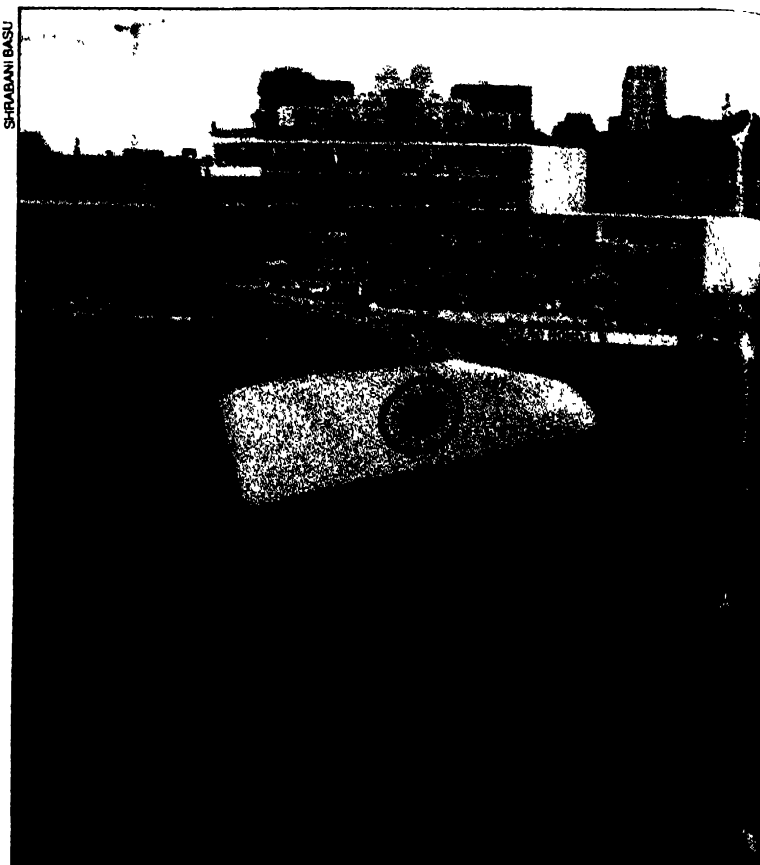


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Ajay Jadeja is congratulated by an Indian fan on scoring a century

puter consultant. "I'm not going to miss a single India match." After Oval, the friends were headed for Manchester, where the mother of all cricket battles would be played against Pakistan at Old Trafford.

Others weren't so lucky to get tickets through the regular agency. For them, the touts would have to do. Tickets changed hands for over three times the price. The 60-pound ticket at The Oval were selling for 200 pounds. Tickets for the India-Pakistan match changed hands for similar amounts. Some said they were 'plain lucky' to get it for 110 pounds, a snip for such a good game.

If Norman Tebbit's cricket test for British Asians was to be tried out, each one of them would fail it by a large margin. At Edgbaston, for the India-England match, Indian fans outnumbered English fans three to one. The stadium was awash with India flags and even the English cricketers, who found themselves battling alone, said they had never played a match in England with such an 'electric atmosphere'.

It was the same story at The Oval. Once again, Indian fans outnumbered

the Australians and the support was dazzling. As the first of the Super Sixes was played, the carnival seemed to be finally taking off. An old Englishman was doing a *bhangra*, the Aussies and the Indians were dancing together to Calypso music and the tri-colour never stopped fluttering, even when India was losing.

The crowd cheered India till the last batsman, even when the run rate had climbed to over 15 runs an over. They even cheered every wide, because it meant a point and screamed themselves hoarse as the partnership of Ajay Jadeja and Robin Singh scored brave runs. And even after India lost, the fans went home singing all the way.

But the ultimate subcontinent scorcher was the clash between India and Pakistan at Old Trafford. Days before the event, it was already being described by the Indian media and the commentators as 'war'. With guns blazing Kargil, there was much talk about how this was the match that would bring the politics of the subcontinent to English soil.

While events manager Michael Browning dismissed it as 'media hype', he nevertheless admitted that security

would be intensified and every attempt to disrupt the match would be firmly handled.

But captains appealed to the organisers to do something about pitch invasions as someone could get seriously hurt. Azharuddin and Rahul Dravid had been jostled and heckled by a spectator after the Indian team lost to South Africa at Hove. The Pakistani team had been manhandled by a fan after their defeat to Bangladesh. Equally ecstatic fans had carried Venkatesh Prasad on their shoulders after the win against England. It could all result in serious injury.

Meanwhile, Greater Manchester Police had got into the act to police the biggest cricket match of the World Cup. They issued a press release and said they were in touch with local community leaders and the Lancashire Cricket Club to "ensure the safety and enjoyment of all fans coming to Old Trafford". The spokeswoman for the police said, they were "prepared for any eventuality".

As segregation of the 22,000 fans was not possible, the police roped in the community leaders of both Indian and

The crowd cheered India till the last batsman was on, they cheered every wide and even after India lost, they went home singing all the way

PHOTOGRAPH BY SHRABANI BASU



Pakistani communities and asked them to appeal to the youngsters to not disrupt the matches. Community leaders were also invited to watch the match from the terraces on closed circuit television and identify potentially violent fans. Plainclothesmen, trained in football match intelligence, would be spreading through the stadium, identifying trouble-makers.

Addurab Alvi, chairman of Manchester's Pakistan Society and Central Mosque Trust, said he had volunteered to mingle with the crowd and contain tempers. Even former Pakistan captain

Imran Khan offered his services to Lancashire County Cricket Club to calm nerves.

Manchester has a large Pakistani population and the city has been described by Wasim Akram as his second home. Manchester is also home to a large number of Mirpuri Kashmiris who could bring the present situation in Kargil straight onto the pitch at Old Trafford. Or so everybody predicted.

In the end, apart from a few stray incidents, the partying carried on till late night. The biggest security operation ever mounted prevented any ungainly sights, and though the pitch was invaded, and minor skirmishes broke out between fans, offenders were quickly rounded up by security. The Pakistani and Indian flags flew side by side as the fans cheered their teams and many came carrying banners that read 'Do Not Mix Politics With Cricket'.

"We have come here to back our teams and watch good cricket," said a fan. "No one wants to disrupt the match."

The screaming, drumming, whistling and singing never stopped for a single minute as the game was being played. Every possible musical instrument —

drums, saxophones and guitars — had been brought in. Offensive posters were not allowed and poles and weapons were banned. The Indian flags waved even as someone from the Pakistan team scored a six. Nothing was going to daunt the high spirits. On the terraces, there was good-humoured heckling between the fans but it was all in the spirit of the game. Some British Asians — both Indian and Pakistani — had even travelled together for the match. At no time was there even the remotest chance of the game being disrupted. It was a thrilling contest and the fans had come to enjoy it.

The much-criticised ECB could say the cricket carnival had finally arrived. At the home of Manchester United Football Club, the guns and bombs of Kargil were like distant thunder. The here and now was cricket — Shoaib vs Sachin and Inzamam vs Srinath. Anything else simply did not matter.

At the end of the match, Wasim Akram graciously said he was glad for the Indian team that they had won, because they had played well and deserved to win. The Manchester declaration, nothing less. •

Shrabani Basu/London



RIISING CAREER ARC OF STAR-CHILDREN

Drab, dowdy people are out Talented, exciting people — offspring of celebrity parents — are in. Profiling two of our young and beautiful stars in the making:

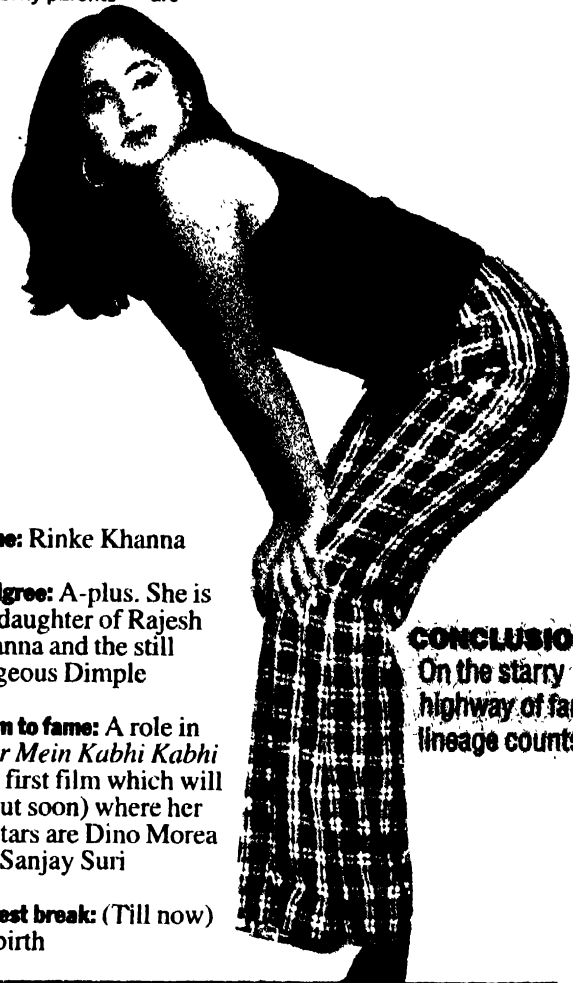


Name: Rahul Khanna

Pedigree: Impressive. He is Vinod Khanna's son and Akshaye's brother

Claim to fame: The MTV VJ-cum-model-cum-actor recently starred in a Broadway production. Also has a role in Deepa Mehta's next venture *Earth*

Biggest break: A photo-profile in *Vogue*



Name: Rinke Khanna

Pedigree: A-plus. She is the daughter of Rajesh Khanna and the still gorgeous Dimple

Claim to fame: A role in *Pyar Mein Kabhi Kabhi* (her first film which will be out soon) where her co-stars are Dino Morea and Sanjay Suri

Biggest break: (Till now) her birth

CONCLUSION:
On the starry highway of fame, lineage counts

Nothing much you can do if fate frowns; you crib, go on feeding honest labour in the success slot machine and crib again. But when it smiles? It's harmonic convergence really if you happen to be a singer. Dining with husband Shekhar Kapur and the creators of his next venture, *Phantom Of The Opera*, Suchitra Krishnamurthy met celebrated composer Andrew Lloyd Webber who thought she had a melodious voice. It didn't

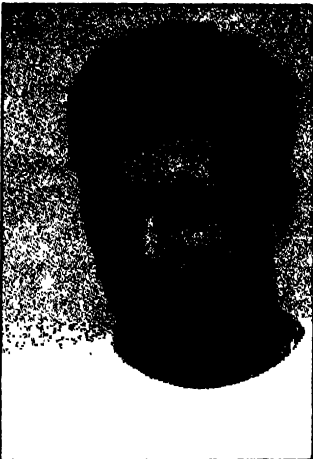
HARMONIC CONVERGENCE



end there. Webber agreed to compose a single for her next album. This is the first time that someone of his stature is going to be associated with Hindi pop. The song, *Zindagi*, will be produced by HMV and though Webber wanted to release it as a single, the producers weren't willing. India, they said, doesn't have a market for singles. Coming back to Shekhar's glamorous wife, wonder which composer she'll thank: Webber or the one above?

PRIDE COMES BEFORE FALL

at Manchester, Pakistan cricket captain **Wasim Akram** remarked that the tie was really a practice session for future crunch games. India won by 47 runs. After the match was over, the chastened blusterer was left



SANTOSH GHOSH

Lesson for arrogant, unruly sportspersons: at times, a little humility isn't out of place. The details:

before their World Cup match against India

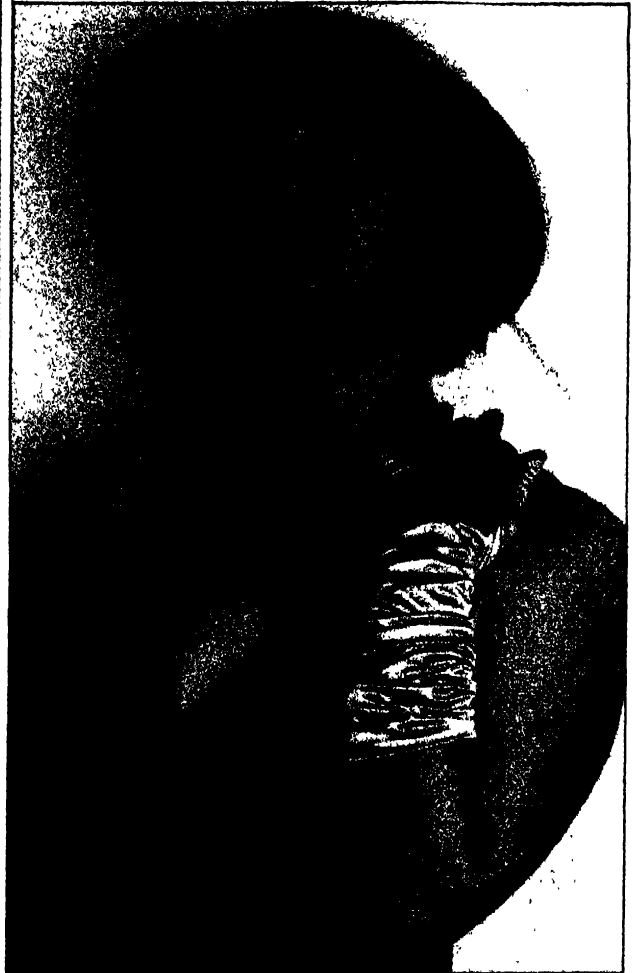
numbling out excuses. "We have got into this habit of making things difficult," he said, admitting that India were the better side. Just across the Channel at the French Open finals, a petulant 18-year-old suffered the punishment of her life: a loss to a fading star and a US\$ 1,500 penalty for tantrums on court. **Martina Hingis**, the world number one, first smashed a racquet, then

crossed the netline to argue a call, used a bathroom break at the start of the third set to change her shirt and hair style, served underarm on the first match point she faced and then stormed off the court before the prize ceremony before her mother coaxed her back. "You know, I had to fight against the whole crowd, the umpire, the referee and the line judges," she said after the match. "I know Steffi is a great champion and the crowd obviously loves her here...But this was something else." Maybe, you deserved it.

AFP



MUSIC IS THE FOOD OF LOVE



In quirky popland, success can be an off-again on-again here-I-come here-I-go phenomenon. You may be sliding up the popularity ladder, singing your heart out to zip crowds, when hey presto! you hit rock-bottom. Of course, it can also be exactly the other way round. Ten years after she cracked the Indian pop market with *Babydoll* and quite a while after her last dramatic comeback with *Made In India*, **Alisha Chinai**, our hep Indian version of Madonna, has clinched what probably is the deal of her life: a three-and-a-half-year contract with the London-based music company EMI. She'll be doing two albums for them.

Singing luck, it seems, has coincided with new romance — her latest lover is an Albanian called Petrit. Alisha says she identifies with her lover-boy because Mother Teresa was also Albanian. Apparently, the two communicate through signs and gestures: Petrit doesn't speak English.

WANNA HAVE A G



A young sex-worker: casual about the hazards

Love doesn't live here anymore. Welcome to Premnagar, a section of the Tyagi-dominated village, Revda, past the Jhatikra Road on the Delhi-Gurgaon highway, about 40 km from the heart of the capital.

Premnagar deals with the business of love.

The burly truckers, the towering Jats from Haryana, and the yuppies, driving down in sleek cars all the way from

Delhi throng the village. Hordes of *jawans* drop in from the nearby Border Security Force training camp in search of a little nookie, a cuddle, an embrace...

If there is one thing that the village with about 150 houses — you can't possibly call them homes — sells freely here, it is women. Whether you like them old, middle-aged, young or even adolescent, they're available for a price.

A whole village of prostitutes? It's been on for the last ten or more years.

Meet the women of Premnagar

Neither the husbands nor the sons of the women involved in the world's oldest profession, try to come in the way. In fact, they promote it.

Belonging to the Pedhnee caste, considered as a tribe in Rajasthan and a Scheduled Caste in Delhi, originally most of the inhabitants of the village were wanderers. In 1974-75, Bhoop Singh Tyagi, the then *pradhan* of Revda, rehabilitated them and provided the Pedhnees land to live on, across the village, on the other side of the Jhatikra Road.

Swine-rearing and shepherding became their sole profession. But over time, because of impoverishment, they turned to begging and now, this.

In ones and twos, women started venturing out of the village for money. At the same time, the men realised that they didn't need to work anymore. Before anyone realised, all the women of the village had turned into professional sex-workers.

Today, Premnagar has a primary school but only eight to ten boys studied there. They have since left the village.

SUNDAY reached Premnagar early in the morning. While in other Indian villages women would leave their homes in the early hours of the day to start their chores, here it was different. Scores of dishevelled women, with smeared lipstick and kohl-lined eyes, were hobbling back home after a night out.

Parmila, one of the few who had stayed at home due to illness, said that truck drivers were their major clients, for whom the women step out in the night. "They pay us very well and never cause any physical harm," she said. Parmila disclosed that it was because of the acquaintance with the truck drivers that the women dared to go out. "Otherwise, what has to happen, happens here."

The first encounter with a sex-worker, Sanoj, certainly depicts the desperation, the frame of mind and the way of life of the women and men living in Premnagar. Wearing a red *salwar* suit

ODD TIME, BABY?

and cheap lipstick, Sanoj, hardly 19, sat at the tea stall that doubled up as a bar, where beer and hard drinks were available at any time of the day.

"Aye! Idhar aao na, kuchh thanda — garam le lo," was her first call. Getting closer to her, it was indeed a shock. "C**** lena hai? Pachas rupaye mein!" she asked point-blank.

All this went on even as an old hag with beady eyes continued to suck laboriously at a *beedi*, and close by, a young man lay sprawled on a cot within earshot. It was later discovered that the old woman was Sanoj's mother-in-law while the man lying there was her husband.

Inside her hut, she said that her mother-in-law was into prostitution before she was married and brought into the village. "I belong to nearby village, Paprawat. My father sold me off as he took a lot of money before he handed me over," she narrated.

Sanoj never wanted to sell herself. She said that when her husband, whom

Wearing a red *salwar* suit and cheap lipstick, Sanoj, hardly 19, lured prospective customers, even as her mother-in-law sat and her husband lay on a cot within earshot

she never named even once, stopped working and started neglecting the sheep and swine, she had little else to sustain on. Poverty and hunger and the easy money that the other women in the village were making, lured Sanoj into the profession. She now earns about Rs 200 a day, depending on the clientele.

Billa's wife, Dules, has been in the business for some time now. "I charge what my client can afford to pay," she divulged after great persuasion. She claimed that truck drivers and the "hero log" (visitors from Delhi) were the best customers.

With electricity procured from *tokas* (hooks thrown over main lines), life bustles in the otherwise sleepy hamlet. As all the five government-installed lines have remained dry throughout the ten or even more years, water drawn from the wells and an odd handpump is something of a luxury, explained Billa.

Sharmila's case is somewhat different. Married at 14, she became a mother before she could realise what had happened to her body. She found herself saddled with abusive in-laws and an alcoholic husband. She is now the sole breadwinner of the family.

UMESH PURI



Women of the village: breadwinning the hard way

Today, sitting at the roadside refreshment shop of Suknath, luring profitable customers has turned out to be her way of life. Right from making eyes to questioning in an extremely vulgar manner, she does anything for the extra buck. "Jaise kahoge, waise main tumhare sath sounge," she claims. "Aye dost, dosti karenge?" she asks and coaxes, "Chalo na, dosti karen."

Asked if there would be any trouble if the police came, Sharmila said that there was nothing to worry about. "Woh to kutta jaat hai. Ayega, paise lega aur chala jayega chup-chap. Tum ko kaam karna hai to jao," she sounded convincing.

Sure enough. An hour later, a young customer was stepping out from one of

the houses. A police party that had arrived in the meantime, caught him after figuring out that he was an outsider. Choicest abuses and blows rained on the unsuspecting youth. Then one of the cops took the victim aside and after ten minutes, the faces of both the cop and the customer cracked in smiles. The deal was through.

Everyone in Premnagar is not a passive witness to sexual degradation of its women. A handful of young men, like Raju, continue to object to the proceedings. Raju said that after the scare of the Pardi gang (the so-called criminal tribe of Haryana) they formed a security com-

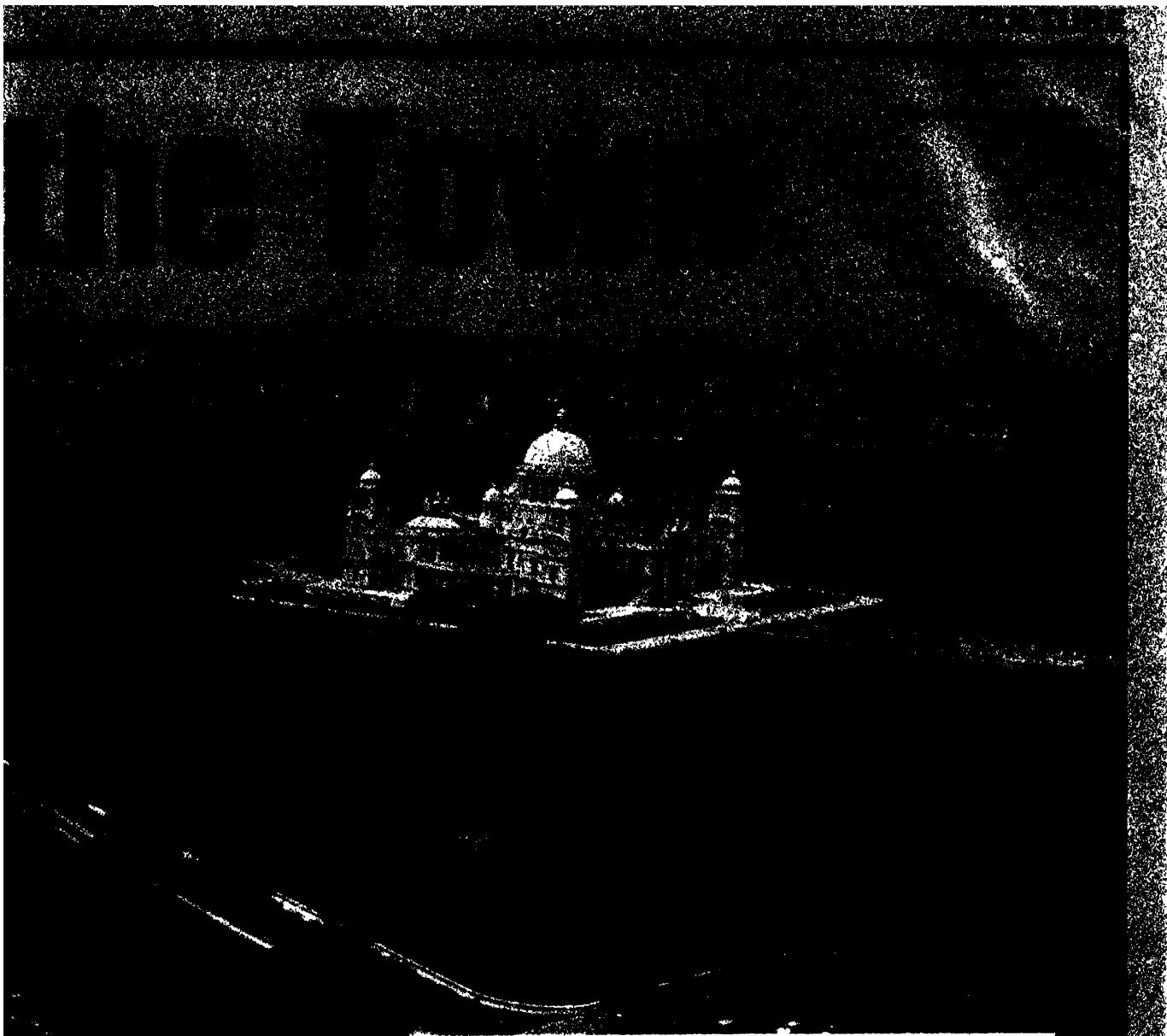
mittee in the village. "We also started turning back the customers. But that angered the men in the village who benefited from the business," he said.

Lack of knowledge about sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS is bound to take its toll on the sex-workers in Premnagar. Sometime last year, two *jawans* from the BSF training camp were detected to be full-blown cases of AIDS. Soon, a BSF medical team came to the village and explained the dangers of unsafe sex.

But that is all. Neither the government nor any NGO has come here since then. Premnagar continues to thrive in darkness — of sorts. •

Naved Zahir/Premnagar and New Delhi





*Will the
renaming of
Calcutta as
Kolkata help
revive Bengali
pride?*

They say when two Bengalis get together, they set up a Durga Puja. And when there are three of them, they set up two Pujas. But here was one instance when, wonder of wonders, all of them, even people belonging to disparate political parties, seemed to agree. Former Pradesh Congress chief Somen Mitra wrote to state home (police) and information minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, pledging his support. A movement spearheaded by the city's intelligentsia to rename Calcutta as Kolkata seemed to have made sense to both the Right and the Left. The need of the hour, said the leaders of the movement, was to inculcate a sense of pride in one's own language, one's own culture, to arrest the erosion of self-esteem and sense of identity from the Bengali psyche. And what better way to initiate the process than calling their city by its Bengali name, officially?

"Changing of Calcutta to Kolkata is something every Bengali should feel proud about"

FEELS SUNIL GANGOPADHYAY

Eminent Bengali author and poet Sunil Gangopadhyay is leading the movement to rename Calcutta and promote Bengali language and culture in West Bengal. He spoke to SUNDAY on the state of the Bengali arts/culture scenario and how he proposes to improve it.

Q: In the last two decades there has been a proliferation of 'intellectuals' in Calcutta — but not much has happened by way of cultural/social achievements. Is there any effort to improve matters on that score?

A: Yes, we are trying to improve in every sphere — drama, films, music. Can't say that about literature because that's a very individualistic thing. But we are trying to better Bengali art and culture as a whole. There should be a concerted effort by all concerned.

Q: One Lalan Mancha and a couple of *Jarigaans* (folk music) wouldn't amount to much unless one tries to adopt an universal and modern language in expressing Bengali folk culture. Look at how Habib Tanvir took folk theatre from Chhattisgarh to different parts of the world. That was possible because he was following the idiom of modern theatre. Then there is Teejan Bai...

A: Lalan Mancha is the starting point. We have plans to spread out to other towns of Poschim Bangla (West Bengal) and try to find out talents. As for Teejan Bai, we have our own Saonli Mitra, who has adopted the folk form with panache.

Q: There is a feeling that the arts/culture people in Calcutta suffer from an insularity, that they are stuck in a groove, expressing themselves in a language which is 50 years old. Whatever happened to the



Sunil Gangopadhyay: "I don't want to rely on the government in all spheres. But there seems to be no alternative"

so-called cultural superiority of the Bengalis?

A: That's a thing of the past. Bengalis used to think that they were culturally superior than the other language groups, which perhaps they were in the 19th century. But they have not declined the way it is made out to be. Intellectuals from other states keep asking me this question with such regularity! I suspect there is some kind of inferiority complex at work.

Tell me, where would you find great world-class literature today, excepting in Spanish? There are some Bengali writers who can compare with them. Especially when it comes to poetry...

Q: But it's quite clear that the younger generation of Bengali writers do not care to find out what's happening in world literature, they don't educate themselves enough... You started writing 40 years back and you are still the best, the finest. Bengali writing doesn't seem to have progressed much since then.

A: The current crop of writers read only Bengali literature through which they aspire to get the best of world literature. But yes, they should be aware of literary activities elsewhere.

I'm quite optimistic. I think the next bunch of Bengali writers would experiment with the language, find new forms and new ideas.

Q: Every cultural activity in West Bengal is state-controlled, state-regulated, even appropriated by the state. And every prominent arts/culture person seems to have

become part of the establishment...

A: It's a recent trend. The state government is organising music fairs, arts fairs and poetry and film festivals. But where does one find other sponsors? A big newspaper house like ABP Ltd is not sponsoring cultural events.

I don't really trust the government, I don't want to rely on the government in all spheres. But there seems to be no alternative.

Q: Does it not worry you that we are fast losing our alternate people?

A: That's what we are trying to make up for. The Bhasha Shahid Smarak Samiti is the nucleus which will grow into a group. It will organise other kinds of cultural activities.

Q: The move to rename Calcutta is being seen as ultra-nationalistic, jingoistic even, ...

A: I think those who say that are suffering from a complex. Some people believe that things should not be altered. My view is that what doesn't change, erodes. Changing of Calcutta to Kolkata is something every Bengali should feel proud about.

Q: Calcutta is now home to the Marwaris, Gujaratis and Punjabis, some of who produce our films and buy our art and help to beautify the city. Does that make you feel insecure?

A: The last CMDA report showed that Bengalis are on the way to becoming a minority in Calcutta. They are just 57 per cent of the total population. I believe in co-existence of all sorts of people, but that doesn't mean one will have to drive out the Bengalis ...

Q: Would it not be sensible to come to an understanding with the non-Bengalis settled here, who have the money and the inclination to work as our benefactors, and try to have a fair exchange of ideas and talents?

A: Yes, why not? Bengalis need not be restricted to Roys, Boses, Chatterjees and Mukherjees; Jhas, Sharmas and Nayars can be as much a Bengali as I am.

After a prolonged dry spell (the Amartya Sen mania had receded in the background and Jyoti Basu's prospects of becoming the Prime Minister fizzled out), this was something the Bengali could mull over and debate over endless cups of coffee in the sooty darkness of the Coffee House in College Street, and by the erratic fountains at film complex Nandan — a favourite haunt of the city's intellectual, cultural and concerned people. Some of them saw the effort as a political move, from which the state government was trying to wrest political mileage, come election time. Some said it was just another gimmick by the self-appointed sentinels of Bengali culture, who suffered from a bankruptcy of ideas. Some felt it smacked of fascist tendencies, *a la* Shiv Sena. Some dismissed the effort as mindless, ahistorical, econo-

second largest linguistic group get any? Concerned at the increasing 'Hindiisation' of Bengali culture, they have drawn up a blue-print of how to tackle it:

■ Bengali should be the official language in all government institutions as well as shops, offices and banks (which means double work when the state has to deal with the Centre, other states, countries)

■ All signboards and car numberplates should be written in Bengali as well (two numberplates on the same car could be quite confusing)

■ Bengali should be a compulsory subject of study in schools in West Bengal up to Class VIII (the standard Bengali school textbooks, both by way of form and content, leave much to be desired. A lot of it is propaganda



Calcutta intellectuals celebrate Bhasha Shahid Dibas (Martyr's Day) on 21 February

mically impractical and sociologically ineffective. Could a mere change of name help revive Bengali pride, they asked. The Durga Puja syndrome was at work.

Renaming the city and the state of West Bengal as Poschim Banga is only one item on the agenda of Bhasha Shahid Smarak Samiti (BSSS), the group of intellectuals who are trying to put Bengali language and culture 'back where it belongs'. If Hindi, they say, can get all the attention and the money from the central government, why can't Bengali whose speakers comprise the

literature)

■ An all-Bengali channel on Doordarshan (there are more than one satellite channels, mostly full of trashy programmes)

■ Attack all those English-language journalists who deride Bengalis as 'Bongs' (which shows why the Bengali fails to produce good humour in literature or cinema these days)

■ Bengalis speaking in English amongst themselves should be made fun of (which ignores the existence of the bi-lingual, multi-lingual Bengali, who thinks in more than one language)

■ Socially boycott parents who do not

encourage teaching Bengali to their children (giving the Bengali language a more universal, modern, contemporary spin would be more effective)

Members of the BSSS (led by poet-author Sunil Gangopadhyay, thespians Kumar Roy and Bibhash Chakraborty, artist Bandhan Das, historian Amalendu De, political activist Azizul Haque) have undertaken this task in the spirit of a crusade and are determined to fight to the end. Even if it results in a 'bloody skirmish'. The inspiration, obviously, comes from the 21 February (1952) Martyr's Day, on which six people in erstwhile East Pakistan fell to the bullets of their rulers for refusing to accept Urdu as the state language. They laid down their lives for the honour of the Bengali language.

To revive the sense of a Bengali pride in the present generation, and to make them aware of the richness and variety of Bengali culture, the BSSS has erected an open-air stage in Curzon Park (now rechristened Surendranath Park) in the heart of the city's busiest office-business district. Called Lalan Mancha after a wandering minstrel famous for his catholicity of views and secular outlook, the stage is now serving as the platform for popularising the performing arts of Bengal, some of which like *jaari-guan*, *kobir ladai* and *raybeshe* are on the verge of extinction.

Which is a laudable effort, no doubt, but will there be very many takers, unless traditional art is presented in a form which appeals to the modern mind? When the Bengali should be out to find his place in the global community, won't a zealous Bengali-centricity narrow his outlook? Would not calling

USHA UTHUP

"I believe in both Calcutta and Kolkata. When I sing *Aha tumi sundari kato Kolkata*, it would be ridiculous to say Calcutta"



Calcutta as Kolkata be tantamount to ignoring the role of the British under whose aegis the city began and thrived?

"If Italians can call Rome as Roma and Germans refer to Munich as Muenchen, why can't Calcutta and Kolkata exist side by side?" asks R.P. Gupta, expert on the city. "One doesn't have to throw one name in the mudwaters of Hooghly and project the other as sacrosanct," he says, pointing out that the name should be called 'Kolikata', as it was called before the British came into the picture, in order to be historically correct. "Besides, the name Calcutta is visually more beautiful than Kolkata," he suggests.

"Personally, I prefer Sutanuti [one of the three villages — Sutanuti, Gobindapur and Kolikata — taken together and named Calcutta by the British]," says

film-maker Aparna Sen. "And as for Poschim Banga, I'd like Gaud [the traditional, indigenous name]."

But debates of historicity and aesthetic appeal apart, the thinking people of Calcutta have not been able to warm up to the idea of a changed name for Calcutta. Most of them dismiss it as a non-issue, if not a gimmick, which could be detrimental to the interests of the city's people. They argue that it could push the Bengali, self-contained in his narcissism, further back into his insular existence. "Kolkata may have been good enough for a handful of people in the past, but it simply won't do for a cosmopolitan city," says literary critic and social commentator Ashoke Sen. The fact that the state's Marxist government has endorsed the renaming project, and, in fact, is sparing no effort to make

Young people take out a rally in memory of the martyrs of the language movement on 21 February





APARNA SEN

**"Personally,
I prefer
Sutanuti to
Kolkata.
And instead
of Poschim
Banga, I'd
like Gaud"**

it happen makes the case a bit more suspect. "In the past 20 years the state has slipped down the education ladder from third to 17th as far as the all-India position is concerned, lost its industrial position," points out Sen.

N.P. Jain, who is a tax-consultant by profession and the vice-president of Concern for Calcutta, an NGO, is more direct. "This renaming business is diverting the attention of people from the real issues. Positive changes towards the betterment of civic life in the city have not happened in the recent years, at least, not upto the mark. This kind of cosmetic change will only end in wastage of money."

Curiously, Calcutta, once known as the culture capital of India, now seems to be caught in a perverse position where the greater the civic discomfort, the higher the cultural achievement ascribed to it. Dogs roam freely in hospital wards, garbage bins overflow by the roadside (if at all they are there), taps run bone dry all of a sudden and traffic snarls regularly clog up the city's potholed roads. Yet, the odd Nobel Prize or a test match hundred by a Calcuttan seems to outweigh these lacunae. "Calcutta was associated with the work of all five Nobel laureates. But in what way has this city benefitted from their work?" asks Suren Munshi, professor of Sociology at the Indian Institute of Management. "Malaria is back, destitutes proliferate and there has been a marked deterioration in the fields of health and educa-

tion. It's a provincial life out here, and each passing day, we are turning the city into a greater province."

Bengali-centricity as a weapon of self-defence against the onslaught of alien cultures via satellite channels, has also drawn flak. "Is Bengali culture so fragile



R.P. GUPTA

**"One doesn't have to
throw Calcutta in the
mudwaters of
Hooghly and project
Kolkata as
sacrosanct"**

that it can be beaten down so easily?" asks singer Usha Uthup. The Tamil-born lady who adopted Calcutta as her home and won the hearts of its residents by singing about her deep attachment to the city wouldn't buy the idea that Bengali culture is on the decline. "It's just that some people have given up believing in themselves, they don't seem to acknowledge that Calcutta's such a warm place full of warm, friendly people. Personally, I believe in both Calcutta and Kolkata. When I'm singing, 'Aha tumi sundari kato, Kolkata (How beautiful you are, Calcutta), it would be ridiculous to say Calcutta."

Uthup's faith in Bengalis notwithstanding, there is a felt need for action among the Bengali intelligentsia — by those that are pushing for a revival of Bengali ethos and those that feel the Bengali-centric nature of the movement could be a non-starter. They all seem to see that there is a stasis in the Bengali's life and the sooner he shakes out of that complacent slumber, those lethargic evening *adda* sessions, the better. Pride in one's own heritage, one's culture is all very well but when it becomes 'a replacement for serious self-analysis', as sociologist Suren Munshi puts it, that doesn't get one very far.

"It's not *Ilish maach*, it's not Rabindrasangeet, it's not Satyajit Ray," says Sunil Gangopadhyay, trying to define Bengali identity. "It's something ingrained in our lives." There seems to be several ways of bringing back, of reasserting that elusive 'something' in the life of a Bengali, by choice or by birth. Every Bengali has his or her own prescription.

While Suren Munshi would say that can be done by creating better awareness, "by questioning oneself where have we gone wrong"; Aparna Sen would ask the business-phobic Bengali to take greater interest in the state's economy and N.P. Jain would stress on cleaning up the roads, clearing the air and plunging headlong into developmental work. Almost all of them will lovingly dwell on Calcutta's glorious past and promising future and try to come to terms with its relentless present, in their own ways.

Looks like Durga Pujas, which have sprung up all over the world and had no problems fitting in with the lifestyles of different people, are going to be around for some time to come. •

Chitralekha Basu/Calcutta

Bangladesh High
Commissioner
Shafi Sami
talks about Indo-
Bangladesh
issues and his
responsibilities
as foreign
secretary

"My tenure challenging pleasant"

Shafi Sami, Bangladesh High Commissioner in New Delhi, is ending his tenure appropriately: he's returning to Dhaka on promotion as foreign secretary. And even as he spoke to SUNDAY, he was tying up the loose ends for Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's significant inaugural bus trip to Dhaka.

The bus symbolises many things: India and Bangladesh are closer today than they've ever been, although Bangladesh is a signatory to the NPT. It is not too worried about the bomb in its backyard, and that border problems are essentially consular issues and shouldn't come in the way of friendlier relations. Excerpts from an interview:

SUNDAY: Clearly, your tenure in New Delhi has been good for India, it's been good for Bangladesh, it has been good for you too...

Shafi Sami: It has been very good for me there is no doubt about it. I have had the opportunity of serving in Pakistan, China and Russia. But India has topped it all. I was delighted when I was nominated to come to New Delhi and I was looking forward to a challenging assignment. I soon found that it was not only challenging but also very pleasant.

Over the last two-and-a-half-year, after the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina took over, things have moved in the right direction. An issue which has been outstanding for nearly two decades was resolved and consequently the cloud which had cast a shadow over Indo-Bangladesh relations

which occurred in these two years is the return of the Chakma refugees. We had nearly 60,000 of them living in Tripura for a long time. There was a partial resolution of the problem and the number had come down to 55,000. But nothing was moving. In the winter of 1997, we succeeded in taking them back.

It was essentially a matter between the refugees and us. But India's cooperation helped. India was both friendly and cooperative.

It also saw the cessation of hostilities against Bangladesh by the armed wing of the refugees, namely the Shanti Bahini. And consequently, we succeeded in having a peace accord with them. This is a great development in the internal affairs of Bangladesh. It has heralded peace and stability in a region torn with strife.

It was not easy. It needed bold, courageous steps and she took them. Today we have a local council system and we have full participation of the local people.

All this gives me great satisfaction. And now the decision that I'm to be the foreign secretary, because I've lived in India and I've a full appreciation of the feelings of the people of India, will help me to advise my government better.

Bhutan has wound up camps of the ULFA militants from its soil. We're told that the top leadership of ULFA is still in Bangladesh....

Destabilisation of India is not to the advantage of Bangladesh. The destabilisation of the north-east region in India is



was and

likely to affect Bangladesh adversely: in terms of ethnicity, in terms of religion and in terms of language. It is in our interest that we shouldn't be a party to destabilisation.

However, the border between India and Bangladesh, particularly in the Chittagong Hill Tracts Area, is very porous. As a result, it may not be impossible for militants to creep into Bangladesh. But I can assure you that Bangladesh is committed not to give them shelter, succour, training or any other kind of help. And our Indian friends are reasonably satisfied with the determination that the Bangladesh government has shown in addressing this issue.

This is quite different from the Bangladesh's earlier stand: that these militant leaders were not based there.

"I have had the opportunity of serving in Pakistan, China and Russia. But India has topped it all. I was delighted when I was nominated to come to New Delhi and I was looking forward to the assignment"

Well, as I said, we do not harbour them. We do not give them training facilities. We do not sympathise with them. And that has been our consistent position.

There is a lot of Indian concern about the migration from Bangladesh into India — especially in urban agglomerates.

On this issue, perceptions differ. We do not see enough cogent reason why there should be a migration of the scale you mention. If we refer to the Human Development Reports of the last three years, we find that there is parity of purchasing power between the two countries. If you look at the rate of the population growth in India and the states bordering Bangladesh, ground reality does not reveal this kind of migration.

There are other reasons too, to indicate that this perception is incorrect. Given the kind of border India and Bangladesh share, if there is any trans-border movement in either direction, the two governments are quite capable of resolving it as a consular problem. The two border security forces have agreed modalities. In 1991, they have worked out the details.

The home secretary of India and Bangladesh had met in October 1990. They reiterated the need to resolve this issue through consular channels. So, we need not give a political dimension to an issue which can be resolved at the consular level.



Can we talk about trade?

Over the last 10-12 years, Bangladesh has emerged as a very significant trading partner of India. After we opened up our economy, reforms, reduction in tariff structure, exports from India have risen very significantly. Today, Bangladesh is India's sixth-largest trading partner. It is the third-largest export market of Indian goods in Asia. And in South Asia, we account for 53 per cent of India's South Asia-bound exports. The official export figure from India is to the tune of \$1.5 billion which represents an increase of 3,000 per cent over the last 10-12 years.

We do see it as a positive development. Perhaps, it is natural — there is continuity, cultural affinity, long land border, familiarity of business practices and communities...Indian exporters have taken full advantage of it. These factors should apply equally to Bangladesh exports into India. Unfortunately, they have not.

In the last few years, fortunately some

very good decisions have been taken. Because of the South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA) on a number of goods, Quantitative Restrictions (QRs) and Non Tariff Barriers (NTBs) have been dismantled. And once SAPTA is properly implemented, we hope there will be some impact.

And one important step to help Bangladeshi exports into India would be setting up of Joint Ventures (JVs) with buy-back arrangements.

But there has been private sector investment in JVs in Bangladesh. It hasn't worked. The Birlas have a venture...

It will work. The important thing is to select the right industry. Take a cement plant. The raw material could come from Meghalaya and the plant could be set up in Bangladesh with buy-back

LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR: *Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina*

arrangements.

I can't understand. If it works for the Koreans, if it works for the Japanese, if it works for the Europeans and Americans and even the South-East Asians, why can't it work for India? We would be quite prepared to give the Indians a dedicated export promotion zone. In sectors of their choice, we can go for JVs, even exclusively with an eye to the Indian market.

We also feel that some Bangladesh specific-affirmative action by the Government of India towards Bangladesh would be greatly appreciated.

What you're saying is: let's have free trade, but let's not have free trade beyond a point.

I don't say that. I think free trade is a goal which we have set for ourselves in SAARC. But free trade has some preconditions. No, not preconditions, merely measures that need to be taken to see that benefits of free trade accrue to all.

Till such time as we go for SAPTA, Bangladesh should be entitled to certain measures as an LDC economy. If Bangladeshi products do not face NTBs and QRs, and do get a reasonably low tariff barrier...

Then also, because we have a weak manufacturing base. We may not have huge exportable surplus. But we will have the satisfaction knowing that at least we are allowed the facilities of the trade regime in India, and if we have not been able to take advantage of it, it is our own fault.

One natural resource Bangladesh has is natural gas and India is a ready buyer...

We're still exploring our gas reserves. Estimates vary wildly. No one is sure how much gas we have. Once the survey is concluded, the second step would be to strike a balance between conservation of the precious resource and its commercial utilisation.

As far as we are concerned, we would like India's help in value addition. Fertiliser factories could be set up in Bangladesh with a buy-back arrangements with states like West Bengal and north-east, which are big consumers of fertilisers.

The main thing to remember: economic considerations should not be dictated by politics. •

Interviewed by Aditi Phadnis/New Delhi



"Destabilisation of India is not to the advantage of Bangladesh. The destabilisation of India's north-east is likely to affect Bangladesh adversely: In terms of ethnicity, in terms of religion and in terms of language..."

Media bashing

Mulayam bans TV scribes from the Samajwadi Party's Lucknow office

After the the Bahujan Samaj Party supremo, Kanshi Ram, kicked up a controversy by slapping a TV journalist, it's now Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav who has threatened to let loose his henchmen on the electronic mediamen in Lucknow.

And if Kanshi Ram had got enraged over the media's attempt to encroach upon his privacy, Mulayam has taken affront to the electronic media ignoring a function of his party's youth wing, scheduled to be addressed by him, that coincided with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's Lucknow visit on 10 June.

"The Prime Minister has come to the state capital and the whole electronic media are busy trailing him as if he was visiting Lucknow for the first time; and look at their cheek, they just ignore this youth convention of our party," said Mulayam.

In a huff, therefore, he instructed his state unit chief Ram Saran Das to ensure that representatives of the audio-visual media were barred from entering the state headquarters of the party. "You should see that they are not invited; and if they happen to sneak in, they must be chased out instantly," he roared.

Taking serious note of the incident, the UP Press Correspondents Committee and the State Electronic Media and News Agencies Correspondents Association resolved unanimously to condemn the act. They termed it as a direct attack on the freedom of the press. The resolution also sought to apprise Mulayam in no uncertain terms that coverage of a political function or any other event was the sole discretion of the media and no one had the right to dictate terms to it.

But Mulayam's antipathy towards the media was not new. When he became chief minister for the first time in 1989, he was blunt enough to spell this out at a May Day function at the UP Press Club. That was the time when newspapers were highlighting his alleged underworld connections. "Go ahead and write whatever you want to, I don't care. Thank God my voters do not read newspapers, otherwise I would never get elected," he said.



"The whole electronic media are busy trailing the PM as if he was visiting Lucknow for the first time; and look at their cheek, they just ignore the youth convention of our party," said Yadav

The recent incident has revived memories of his "hulla-bol" campaign against two prominent Hindi dailies. His party toughs had torn and burnt the copies of the dailies and ransacked their offices at some places.

But realisation dawned that a bad press was a major hurdle in his ambitious path. By the time he got his second stint as CM in 1994, he took a somersault. From media-bashing, he instantly turned to media-wooing, which culminated in doling out nearly Rs 3 crore to the journalists of UP and Delhi.

That, of course, did turn the fortunes

of some journalists. And for those who criticised his dubious generosity in their columns, he remarked, "Who cares about all this nonsense? Let me tell you I will dole out even more money when I become chief minister for the third time."

Now that he is out of power, even a little indifference shown by the media annoys him. Thus, even though the youth wing function hardly merited national coverage, Mulayam says that it was an "insolent" act on the part of the media not to cover it. Many, however, wonder if this jitteriness was a manifestation of frustration. •

Sharat Pradhan/Lucknow

Ultimately, money played an inevitable role. Candidates as well as voters fell to pelf like nine pins. Sworn enemies withdrew overnight in favour of their adversaries. And the people who blamed the overambitious Goan politicians for a depraved governance had to succumb to them once again.

Neither the Congress nor the BJP emerged emphatic winners. For the record, however, the former had a better tally, while the latter earned the right to be the main Opposition by default.

The 4 June mandate brought about a status quo ante, with Luizinho Faleiro, who was deposed on 9 February, once again becoming chief minister, having a wafer-thin majority of 21 for the Congress in the 40-member House.

While the MGP secured merely four seats as against 12 it held earlier, the other regional parties — the United Goans Democratic Party (UGDP) and the Goa Rajiv Congress Party (GRCP) — notched two seats each. Insidore Fernandes was the lone Independent to win from Poiguinim.

Ironically, the sword of Damocles seems to hang on Faleiro even as he was elected "unanimously" as the 15th chief minister by the Congress legislature party on 8 June in presence of high command emissaries Manmohan Singh and Madhavrao Scindia. The latter is in charge of Goa.

Discontent was brewing amongst former ministers Subhash Shirodkar, Luis Alex Cardozo, Somnath Zuwarkar, Mauvin Godinho and Victoria Fernandes for being sidelined. The redeeming feature of the new Cabinet was that it comprised only six members — Ravi Naik, Dayanand Narvekar, Francisco Sardinha, Churchill Alemao and Nirmala Sawant besides Faleiro — something Goans have not experienced since 1990. The Congress was indeed true to its electoral promise of forming a Cabinet not more than 15 per cent of the size of the Assembly.

The election which centred around local issues and the choice of candidates, was historic. The country's first "totally electronic" elections evoked a 65.15 per cent response from the 2,00,000 electorate, mainly out of curiosity to experience the "paperless" ballot.

The hi-tech process, however, did not eliminate bogus voting. The revision of electoral rolls itself was questionable, with thousands of migrant labourers

ON THIN ICE

Luizinho Faleiro heads yet another faction-ridden Congress government in Goa



**"The Congress manifesto which I will hand over to the chief secretary today will henceforth be his Gita, Bible and Koran in governing this state,"
Faleiro declared**

being enlisted by contractors at the instance of politicians.

► "The election authorities failed to insist on declaration from the authorities from the original place of residence of these voters. There have been several instances of bogus voting, specially in Congress strongholds. When the same candidates are being elected for 20 years, it is easy for them to find who is a non-resident voter and then vote on their behalf," said Balchandra Naik, who found to his mortification that his daughter had voted when she was actually in Mumbai.

The parties appointed polling agents who were not familiar with the local voters. Election managers failed to scrutinise electoral rolls in advance and get bogus entries deleted. "There have been about 15 per cent bogus voters among the labour class," alleged UGDP candidate Shravan Dubhashi from Margao.

The secrecy of the ballots cast through the voting machines, too, was under doubt. Though the Election Commission advertised that the identity of the voters would remain secret, it could not convince the common voters. It was even alleged that people were told that to get the machine working, one should press the first button, which, incidentally, was to cast a vote in favour of the Congress.

Money, government machinery and musclemen were allegedly used to wrest votes and candidates in as many as 14 seats, according to detractors of the Congress. In Loutolim, where Congress candidate Alexio Sequeira was elected unopposed, the BJP's Seby Fernandes was allegedly paid Rs 6 lakh to withdraw in his favour. In Taleigao, former Congress minister Somnath Zuwarkar was re-elected by 1,827 votes, after his arch-rival MGP's Nicholas Fernandes, who lost by 77 votes in the last election, withdrew.

In St Andre constituency, an Independent reportedly dished out Rs 200 per vote. In Dayanand Narvekar's Tivim constituency, colour TV sets were distributed to workers for every 50 votes garnered. Money, clothes, food and drinks were distributed lavishly among the voters. Handsome donations were made to churches and temples, besides offering sport kits to clubs.

In Taleigao, a van belonging to a catering company followed every meeting of a party. Broilers were distributed to each household. A polling officer was replaced in Cortalim after she was found

instructing voters to vote for the Congress candidate.

Although hooligans were rounded up on election eve, voters were threatened in many places. Even a news item on a BJP complaint of booze being distributed in Taleigao was pulled out from a local daily after Congress goons stormed its office. Neither was any complaint lodged with the police nor was the incident reported.

The greatest casualty of the elections was the Maharashtra Gomantak Party (MGP), which had been in power for 17 years since 1963. In the list of shock defeats for the MGP, former

staff, to collect votes," charged M.K. Jos, spokesman of the All Goa Citizens Committee for Social Justice and Action.

Interestingly, the candidates themselves admitted that money played a role in the elections. The sitting MGP MLA from Pale, Sadanand Naik, said he was denied a party ticket because of lack of "money power". The defeated Congress candidate from Khalap's Mandrem constituency, Sangeeta Parab, said, "Of course, money has played its part in the elections." Khalap's BJP rival Laxmikant Parsekar endorsed her view. Khalap, however, attributed his success to his supporters.

Now Khalap is accused of destroying



Madhavrao Scindia: "We now have done even better..."

Opposition leader Kashinath Jhalmi lost to BJP's Viswa Sarterkar, while former chief minister and daughter of MGP founder Shashikala Kakodkar was humiliated at Mayem by the BJP's Prakash Phate by a margin of 838 votes. Surendra Sirsat was overpowered by the GRCP's Francis D'Souza in Mapusa by 1,675 votes.

The party's total rout was attributed to internal squabbles, with three leaders, Ramakant Khalap, Kakodkar and Jhalmi, aspiring for chief ministership. Khalap is accused of controlling the organisation by keeping some timid leaders happy using the resources of the Mapusa Urban Cooperative Bank (MUCB).

Though Khalap won, his margin was reduced. "Khalap spent a lot of money, dished out loans and offered jobs, plus used the MUCB resources, including

the party by not having an alliance with the BJP. The results indicate that a BJP-MGP combine would have reversed the situation.

Though the BJP secured ten seats as against four in the dissolved Assembly, the gains are mostly due to triangular contests and rebel candidates eating into the Congress vote-bank. In the 1998 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP fielded candidates for both the seats. The votes polled by BJP in all the 40 Assembly segments reveal that they secured 1,59,659 votes, making up 27.58 per cent.

This time, the BJP fielded 40 candidates. One candidate withdrew under pressure in favour of the Congress, facilitating the latter's election unopposed. From the 19 constituencies in the north, the BJP secured 74,365 out of a total of 2,80,249 votes polled. From the 21 constituencies in the south, BJP polled



Rumours are rife that Sharad Pawar is engineering a split in the state Congress through Ravi Naik on the "foreign nationality issue" of Sonia Gandhi

77,110 out of 2,98,549 votes, or 25.83 per cent.

Therefore, in the 39 seats it contested in 1999, BJP secured 1,51,475 or 26.17 per cent, as opposed to 1,51,475 votes or 27.58 per cent in the 1998 elections. At least five to ten per cent swing in votes ought to have been there to back the 150 per cent rise in the number of seats.

With the ten seats it won this time, the BJP will try to blunt the criticism of the party being communal. On the other hand, the Congress will try to cash in on the attacks on Christians as the Catholics are 29.86 per cent in the state.

Also, the BJP's wins were due to the split in votes. Barring the four seats where Christian presence is significant, the other six are Hindu dominated. But the MGP lost the most as its vote-bank was plundered by the BJP.

Minutes after being sworn in as chief minister, Faleiro declared, "The Congress manifesto which I will hand over to the chief secretary today will henceforth be his Gita, Bible and Koran in

governing this state." He also announced that the panchayat elections would be held as soon as possible.

Manmohan Singh, Madhavrao Scindia, Ramesh Chennithala and Govindrao Adik had been camping in Goa for almost a week to ensure the smooth transition of power to Faleiro. But the latter had a daunting task at hand to keep the rebels under check. The small Cabinet itself comprises four aspiring chief ministers — Naik, Narvekar, Alemao and Sardinha — two of them occupying the exalted post at least once in the past.

Being sidelined, Godinho and Victoria Fernandes air dashed to New Delhi on 9 June to lobby for their inclusion in the Cabinet, while Zuwarkar is lobbying through local business contacts. "We had stated that we would be having six or seven ministers besides the chief minister in our election manifesto. We now have done even better by choosing one chief minister and five ministers. This leaves scope for two more," said Scindia

immediately after the swearing-in ceremony.

The Congress's assurance of good governance is however under test. In fact, as Narvekar was being administered the oath of office, the Panjim Bench of the Bombay High Court directed the state government to investigate allegations against him and his brother Subhash, the chief officer and councillors of Mapusa Municipal Council (MMC) of extorting kiosk owners and violation of municipal laws.

The Ravi Naik government between 1991 to 1994 was accused of large-scale land conversions. The only unblemished member of the Cabinet is newcomer Nirmala Sawant. But efforts are on, with the active connivance of a few legislators, to replace her with Victoria, the former president of the defunct vigilante outfit, Goa Protectors.

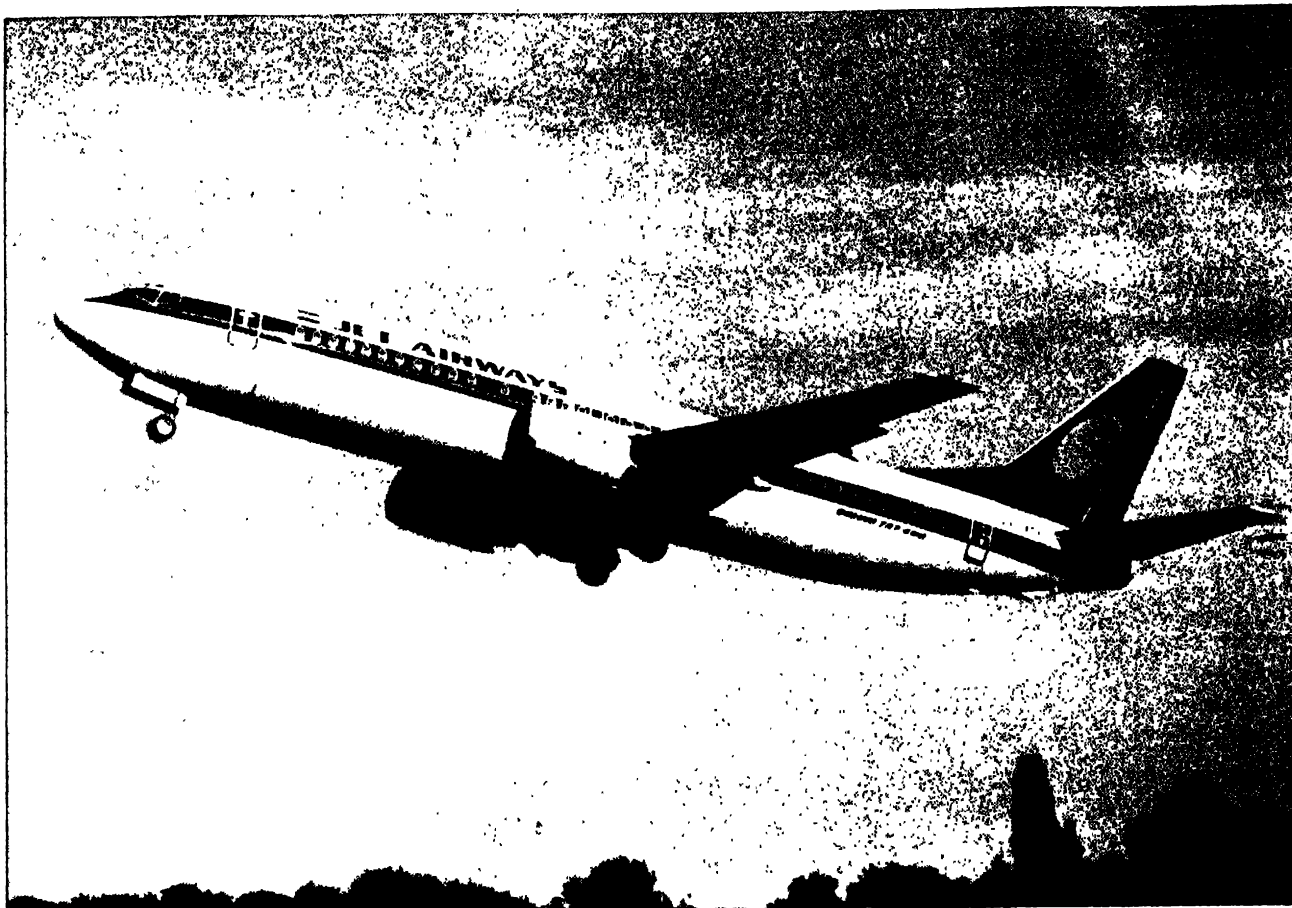
The last time Faleiro was dethroned, he confessed that his days as chief minister were full of tension, with his Cabinet colleagues harassing him for lucrative portfolios or chairmanship of corporations. Now, rumours are rife that Sharad Pawar is engineering a split through Ravi Naik on the "foreign nationality issue" of Sonia Gandhi.

Naik made an attempt to take over the CLP leadership on the ground that a member of the majority community should be designated the chief minister to win back their confidence and combat the growing influence of the BJP in the north. But, since Faleiro led the party to victory it held him in good stead. And he denied the brewing revolt as "wishful thinking".

However, Faleiro has to meet the aspirations of all the 21 MLAs, specially those accustomed to being in the Cabinet. On the last occasion, he had to concede the finance portfolio to Narvekar. The party high command, too, is working out alternatives to quell dissidence by seeking support from the small Opposition parties such as the MGP, the UGDP and the GRCP led by Wilfred De Souza.

Scindia has had a dinner meeting with Khalap, and political watchers believe that the Congress is banking on such groups to ensure the government's survival. The MGP has offered "issue-based support" to the government, while some members of the other two parties, too, have extended support. This may make prospective defectors think twice before jumping over the fence. •

Beeco De Souza from Na/Pana



Jet Airways' new generation aircraft: flight of fancy

And now it's Sahara vs Jet!

On the evening of 2 June, Delhi was hit by a storm. While the rest of the city cheered, the airport authorities plunged into gloom as flight schedules went haywire. As flights were delayed by three to four hours, there was an announcement at the domestic terminal: all passengers travelling by Jet Airways could avail of refreshments (against their boarding cards) at the check-in lounge. It was some 20 minutes later that a similar announcement was made for passengers who held tickets on Sahara Airlines.

India's private airlines slug it out during the off-season

It was a small gesture, but it showed the difference between an established player, and one that is struggling to make a mark.

Currently, there are only three airlines (of consequence) on the domestic route: Sahara, Jet and Indian Airlines. The national carrier has the largest fleet

(53 aircraft) and services the maximum number of destinations (57). It has also cornered 60 per cent of the market share.

Of the remaining 40 per cent, it is Jet that has the lion's share covering 30 per cent of the market, whereas Sahara has 8.5 per cent. One obvious reason for this is that Jet Airways has 25 new generation Boeing 737 aircraft on its fleet; whereas Sahara has only five Boeings. Both airlines have plans to acquire more state-of-the-art aircraft.

But fleet expansion is only one way of cornering the market. The recent cut in fares by Sahara is yet another example



of how the airline is trying to bridge the gap between the two: at least in terms of sales.

The fare cut is not new. This is something that Sahara did last year as well. During the off-season — from April to October — the airline offers its passengers special holiday packages. Under this plan, a Y-class ticket on the Delhi-Bombay-Delhi sector, which would normally cost Rs 10,220, can be picked up for as little as Rs 8,222. Or else, the passenger can pay Rs 10,999 and avail of a night's stay at the Orchid Hotel in Bombay. There are similar discounts on 14 other sectors that are serviced by Sahara.

There are other schemes as well. "For the price conscious customer, we have the Summer Special fare or else the passenger can avail of a free hotel stay," explains Kapil Kaul, chief general manager, sales and marketing, Sahara. "But we have also catered to the corporate traveller, the one whose tickets are paid for by his company," he says, pointing out that this kind of a traveller would not be interested in a cheap ticket. So in order to make him fly Sahara, the airline offers free gifts, much as a Braun mixie-grinder against a Delhi-Bombay-Delhi or a Delhi-Madras-Delhi full-fare ticket. As the number of flights increase, the gifts get fancier: five return tickets could get you a Canon Camera or a 20-inch

A cut in airfare weans away the price conscious traveller. Sahara's load factor goes up during this time, but at a cost to the airline. According to a Jet Airways spokesman, passengers who look for cheap tickets are not the ones who build up brand loyalty

colour TV. And so on.

These schemes are valid only during the off-season. And Kaul says that they have worked, bringing up the load factors to as much as 74 per cent in April as against 50 per cent in March this year. And, says Kaul, it was in response to their holiday packages that the other two airlines decided to go in for similar schemes. Such as Indian Airlines offer of a free ticket to spouses of passengers travelling between Delhi and Bombay until 15 September. The free ticket is only for the return journey.

And, Jet Airways has come up with a Taj-Goa Monsoon Package which

offers its passengers a three-days-and-two-nights stay at the Taj Holiday Village for Rs 6,999 or the Taj Aguada Beach Resort for Rs 7,400. The offer includes an economy class return ticket. The irony here is that while Kaul is celebrating the fact that his airline has forced the others to launch copy-cat schemes, Jet's package works out to be much better than the one offered by Sahara on the same sector. Sahara acknowledges this tacitly, as is evident by the fact that while the rest of its advertisements for the Holiday Plan quote the prices offered by Jet Airways and Indian Airlines in order to bring out the difference, the one for the Goa plan only cites the Indian Airlines fare.

But all this is very well during the off-season when the fares are offered at a discount. The cut in prices does wean away the price conscious traveller. Sahara's load factor goes up during this time (as it has), but at a certain cost to the airline. And according to a Jet Airways spokesperson, the kind of passengers who look for cheap tickets are not the ones that build up any kind of a brand loyalty. "Look at the profile of the passengers who opt for Sahara rather than Jet. These passengers will fly Sahara as long as it gives them cheap tickets," he said, pointing out that no airline can sustain these discounted fares over a long period of time.

At Sahara you pay for a round trip to Goa and avail of an All-Inclusive vacation. Almost free!

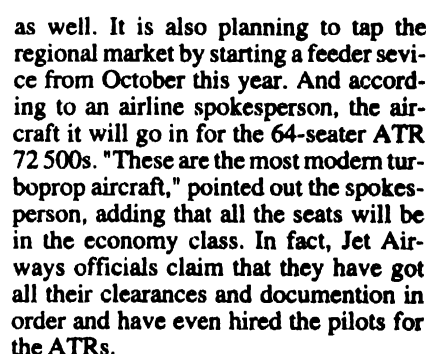
And one way of checking the profile of passengers who fly a particular airline is to check the number of business-class seats. While Sahara's Boeings have as little as 12 seats in the J-class (Sahara Royale) on each aircraft, Jet offers 16 business seats on its 737-500s and as many as 28 on its 737-800s. The business-class passenger is not as tempted by price cuts and freebies as the economy-class passenger. And it is among this class that an airline can hope to build some kind of a brand loyalty.

"How can you call us fly-by-night?" protests Kaul, pointing out that they had been around for over five years now. Then again, so has Jet Airways and while Naresh Goyal has been accused of many things, no one has accused him of running a fly-by-night operation.

friendly airline," he added.

Apart from the helicopter division, the airline plans to launch Sahara Connect from October this year. "By April 2000, we will induct twelve 30-seater turboprop aircraft," said Kaul, pointing out that this would function as a regional airline, operating in a hub and spoke arrangement with the main airline. Three aircraft each will be stationed in all the four metros.

Banking on brand loyalty: Nareesh Goyal of Jet Airways



While these two slug it out, it is the passenger who is enjoying the ride. Even Indian Airlines, which at first refused to be drawn into this price-war by claiming that it targetted the service rather than the price segment (despite Sahara offering valet services and tele check-in to all its customers), has been drawn into the fray. Last week, the national carrier came up with a 50 per cent discount to spouses of those passengers holding a return ticket on the Delhi-Bombay sector.

But it is only in October, when the carnival is over and the freebies have been distributed, that Sahara will know if it has managed to make a difference or not. Or at the end of it all, after having collected their colour TV sets, will the passengers once again go back to their preferred airline? •

SUNDAY 20—26 June 1999

As a nation, are we becoming more and more xenophobic?



Who is an 'authentic Indian'? At the rate we are going, this may become a major issue in the days to come. If you are a Muslim or a Christian, you'd need

to prove that you don't ever look at Mecca or the Vatican. If you are a Tamil, you could be accused of favouring Sri Lanka. If you were none of these and had taken Indian citizenship, then you stand proven as anti-national. The 6 June issue of *Organiser*, the RSS mouth-piece calls Mrs Sonia Gandhi by a new name — Sonia da Gama.

An interesting argument on this issue was put forth by Vidya Subramaniam of the *Times of India*. The article exposes the hypocrisy of the Indian mind, which while grabbing credit for good work done by citizens of Indian origin abroad, denied the same to those born abroad and then acquired Indian citizenship.

This attitude begins with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee who recently lauded the achievements of 200 MPs, 68 ministers, four presiding officers and three ministers. These persons, all of Indian origin, hold these high posts in 19 nations. Addressing a meeting of parliamentarians of Indian origin, the Prime Minister said, "Assimilation, integration and harmonising divergent views come naturally to Indians."

The same Vajpayee, pointed out Vidya Subramaniam, toes the stand of the BJP. And more recently, Sharad Pawar wanted that Mrs Sonia Gandhi be treated as a foreigner and debarred from holding high offices in India. "In other words, we will celebrate the exploits of the overseas Indian, enumerate with pride the political offices he holds elsewhere and attribute all this to the inspiration he draws from his native land. But we will shut our own frontiers to foreign influence and insist that the purity of Indian soil must be preserved. We are enormously pleased with those who, having left our shores, still retain their links with us. But we will charge those who have to come to live among us with harbouring divided loyalties, even if they should be missionaries toiling to

Divided loyalties



Addressing a meeting of parliamentarians of Indian origin, Prime Minister Vajpayee recently observed that harmonising divergent views came naturally to Indians. But the same Vajpayee now toes the line taken by Sangh Parivar

bring succour to leprosy patients in areas none of us would want to go."

Wise, painfully truthful words. Not many people in our media have the broad vision of Ms Vidya Subramaniam. Very rightly she also referred to the exuberant support given to the Indian cricket team in their World Cup match against England by citizens of Indian origin who had settled down in the UK and doing well. Weren't they disloyal to the country which had made them what they are today? Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray, who often rails at the imaginary support given by Indian Muslims to the Pakistan cricket team, should be made to answer this question.

Why is our media so soft on people like Sharad Pawar who had once crawled before Sonia Gandhi but now accuse her of being a 'security risk'? Going by this logic guiding Pawar, the RSS and so many of our 'intellectuals', Prime Ministers Basdev Pandey of Trinidad and Mahendra Chaudhary of Fiji should be stripped of their positions in their respective countries, argues Ms Subramaniam. According to sentiments expressed by Vajpayee, these gentlemen shared "emotional, cultural and spiritual links with Bharat, our common motherland."

We are very good at playing 'patriot games' without understanding the meaning of the word 'patriot'. Says Vidya Subramaniam, "The India for Indians argument is dangerous because it is possible to disqualify virtually the entire country under this definition. In the one-time French colony of Pondicherry, there are many natural-born Indians who had opted for French citizenship. What do we do with this vast community which was born on this soil, lives on this soil and yet swears allegiance to a foreign land? No doubt future xenophobics would order the wholesale deportation of this 'disloyal' group." The writer pointed out that free India's first three Air Chiefs were British and the task of investigating the 1962 military debacle against China was entrusted to a Britisher, Henderson Brooks. *Organiser* will argue that the BJP was not in power then!

Different strokes

M.J. Akbar in *The Asian Age* made an interesting study of Nehru's approach towards China which finally resulted in disillusionment in 1962, and Atal Behari

Vajpayee's concept of relations with Pakistan. Despite Atalji's admiration of Nehru, says Akbar, "the only thing Vajpayee has managed to emulate from the Nehru years is to repeat the biggest blunder of Nehru's career. His China policy. Kargil is the Aksai Chin of the 1990s. The Lahore Declaration is the *pancha sheela* of our times."

Akbar admits that Vajpayee's Pakistan policy did not have the depth of Nehru's China policy which was constructed in the context of a world view. It is true that Beijing never allowed the *Hindi Chini bhai bhai* theme to interfere

drunk and songs sung, infiltrators were sneaking into India and massacring Indian villagers. How gullible can India be? Says Akbar, "Nawaz Sharif made it clear even among the hallelujahs in Lahore this year that Kashmir remained on his agenda; it was the Indian Prime Minister and his drum boys who spread the word that Kashmir had been shifted to a backburner. The price for this negligence is being paid now." The media was also caught napping.

There was also a major difference in the approaches of Nehru and Vajpayee.



Why is our media so soft on people like Sharad Pawar, who had once crawled before Sonia Gandhi but now accuse her of being a security risk?

with its territorial claims in the Himalayas. When the Chinese felt that they had exploited Nehru enough, they marched into India and grabbed territory which they believed belonged to them.

According to Akbar, Islamabad similarly exploited the wooliness in Vajpayee's view of Pakistan that was also born of a belief that certain limits would not be crossed while the process of turning a dialogue into peace was in play. "Nawaz Sharif fed and feted Vajpayee in Lahore and both sang out the Lahore Declaration to an angelic melody by a willing media, full of the right notes." It is now clear that even as toasts were

The former and his defence minister Krishna Menon, pointed out Akbar, never hid behind the skirts of the famous phrase: 'I was misquoted'. But this was exactly what defence minister George Fernandes and his boss did when confronted with public fury over the 'safe passage to infiltrators' statement. "It was only when the 'safe passage' became unsafe for the political future of Vajpayee and Fernandes, that the two of them decided they had been 'misquoted' by the media." Can the duo answer Akbar's question: "Why are the politicians so convinced that the people are gullible"? •

Joie de vivre

Leander Paes and Mahesh Bhupathi lift the first grand slam for India

"To be honest, we were just emotionally drained. I don't think we have been able to focus properly since that day," Mahesh Bhupathi told SUNDAY, soon after the top-seeded doubles duo crashed out of the Stella Artois championship in London.

"That day", of course, was the 6th of June. The day Leander Paes and Mahesh Bhupathi made history, lifting the French Open trophy outplaying Goran Ivanisevic and Jeff Tarango. For a nation deprived of sporting achievement — and bracing itself for an early exit from the cricket World Cup — the first grand slam glory for an Indian duo drew congratulations from the Prime Minister and applause from a sports-crazy populace.

"I think it all began with the Australian Open. The close five-set final that we lost made us believe that we could do it. At the French, we took it one match at a time, while always believing that we could win it," said Leander.

For him, the French Open victory vindicates his decision — opposed by many at that time — to team up with Mahesh and focus on doubles. "I always wanted to partner an Indian on the tour and take on the rest. When our partnership clicked, his big serve and return of serve combining with my speed and tactical strength, I really believed that we could win grand slams and be world number one. And that's where we are today."

Till the other day, the duo thrived on being the underdogs, using shock value as one of their great weapons ("Before they knew what had hit them, we could be one set up," is how Paes put it). Now they are the front-runners, with every other team worth its place in the circuit gunning for them. "It's much tougher now, we have to be extra ready before each match," explained Bhupathi.

Leander's coach Bob 'Nails' Carmichael plays a vital part in that preparation. Being a stickler for "homework," Carmichael is always on the ball, keeping an eye on their next-round opponents, studying their strengths and weaknesses and drawing up a list of 'dos and don'ts' the night before. "Half an

hour before every match now, we both are in the same locker room, talking to each other, gearing up, working up a sweat. Once on court, it's a matter of two very professional, ready individuals combining as a team," said Leander.

"Mahesh is presently at 245 in the singles, but he's playing much better than his ranking suggests. In doubles, he is the top-ranked player in the world already. So now he'll be trying to

While Paes agreed that grass "dilutes some of our strengths", the whiff of Wimbledon filled him with "excitement". "My energies are on an upswing... And I feel that the doubles will be most interesting, very open," said Leander.

This is symptomatic of the strains in the 'Lea-Hesh' partnership. There seems to be a sense of complacency in Camp Mahesh, with two grand slams



Lea-Hesh at the French Open: the winning partnership

"When our partnership clicked, his big serve and return of serve combining with my speed and tactical strength, I really believed that we could be world number one," says Paes

improve his singles ranking in the coming months," remarked Enrico Piperno, Bhupathi's coach.

But there seems to be a difference in attitude towards Big W in the two halves of the court. "Grass is not our best surface. So we are not expecting too much. We just want to go out and enjoy our tennis," was what Bhupathi had to say about the strawberries-and-cream slam of the year.

and the world number one ranking already in the bag.

But for Team Leander, these are just milestones on the path to greater glory. "The French Open victory and the number one ranking will push me harder to more grand slams, more Davis Cup victories, Olympic medals. I want us, as an Indian pair, to dominate world doubles for some time to come." •

Sumit Das Gupta/London



PARTING OF WAYS: file picture of Tohra (extreme left) Deve Gowda, Badal and Barnala (extreme right)

PUNJAB

Rocking the boat

The split in the Shiromani Akali Dal will prove expensive for the party

The inevitable has happened. The ruling Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) in Punjab has split, throwing the state into political and administrative turmoil. Two senior Akali leaders, Prakash Singh Badal and Gurcharan Singh Tohra, have again parted ways. The latter now heads a rival SAD faction which has vowed to "free" the parent SAD from the shackles of "family rule".

The maxim that Akalis unite when out of power and divide when in power has come true again, thanks to the leaders. What started off as an innocent suggestion after the defeat of the SAD candidate in the Adampur by-election in 1998 has boiled over to split the party vertically.

All that was suggested to Badal (the suggestion came from Tohra) was to appoint someone (preferably of his own choice) as the acting SAD president so that he could devote more time to administration and governance of the state.

The suggestion did not go down well with Badal and his followers. A carefully orchestrated campaign was launched to isolate Tohra and his supporters, thereby unfolding the internecine war—of Akalis, by Akalis.

What are the issues at stake? Since December 1998, the Akali leadership resorted to plain mud-slinging and calling

each other names. Initially such accusations were veiled, giving the impression that things may eventually be sorted out. Later, it was found that the tirade against Tohra was well planned. In the end, not only Tohra had to go, so did Akal Takht jathedar Bhajji Singh.

What has been the outcome of the factional feud? For the first time in the history of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, a woman (Bibi Jagir Kaur) was appointed president in place of Tohra. Quick changes in the SGPC and at Akal Takht were brought about, forcing Tohra and his men to hold a parallel Khalsa tercentenary function away from the main programme at Anandpur Sahib.

These developments have come at a time when the Lok Sabha election is round the corner. It will bound to affect the poll results. The question is whether Badal will be able to retain all 14 Lok Sabha seats (13 in Punjab and one in Chandigarh)?

Badal at present is busy in renewing his contact with party workers who will eventually have to fight the elections. He is busy with district conferences and right now is cosy up to the Akali Dal district presidents called *jathedars*.

Badal now comes to Chandigarh only to sign papers or

clear files related to transfers and postings. Interestingly, for the first time, a dozen senior IAS and PCS officers have gone on leave. The media in Punjab is now filled with allegations and counter-allegations. And neither side has any worthwhile issue to place before the people. Badal, for instance, has described the Congress as Enemy No. 1 of the Sikhs and the state and has accused Tohra of hobnobbing with the Congress.

Tohra is not sitting quietly. He has accused Badal of promoting his son Sukhbir Singh (a minister of state in the Vajpayee government) and neglecting party workers, subverting democracy by splitting the party and buying SGPC members and the executive and creating a fear psychosis in the minds of the partymen. Expectedly, both Tohra and Badal factions claim their's to be the real Akali Dal. Right at the moment, Tohra is in a disadvantageous position when it comes to party delegates, Vidhan Sabha members and of course SGPC members.

The third factor in Akali politics is the presence of other splinter groups known by their leaders — Kuldip Singh Wadala, Simranjit Singh Mann and the like. Like the SAD, the Youth Akali Dal, the All-India Sikh Students' Federation, the Sant Samaj etc are vertically split between Tohra and Badal factions.

No doubt, the Congress is trying to take advantage of the situation. But it has its own contradictions and is perceived as a party remote-controlled by the AICC from Delhi. The two communist parties and the BSP have, at best, a peripheral presence in the state. The BJP has its own problems, with two ministers, Balramji Das Tandon and Madan Mohan Mittal, having their own axes to grind.

Politics in Punjab can be summed up as follows: the Akali politics is in a shambles. The religious side is dominated by the Tohra faction. On the administrative side, there is virtually no governance as major decisions are left to bureaucrats who indulge in nothing more than pushing files around.

With the leadership crisis, development work has ground to a halt. The financial crisis is becoming serious with each passing day. Wilting under pressure, several tax proposals announced in Vidhan Sabha in March have been rolled back. The only area of hyperactivity seems to be in postings and transfers, with an eye on the Lok Sabha elections.

Despite the mandate in February 1997, the Akalis seem to have messed it up badly. •

Roopa Sharma/Chandigarh

NORTH-EAST

Trade winds

Ramakrishna Hegde promises a new set of policy measures for the north-east

The Union commerce ministry is all set to reorient its policies to boost exports from the north-east to the neighbouring countries like Bangladesh and Myanmar. During his recent visit to Guwahati, Union commerce minister R.K. Hegde assured that a cargo complex will be set up at Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi Airport to promote export from the north-eastern region.

The commerce minister was in Guwahati to attend a confer-



PROMISES TO KEEP: Ramakrishna Hegde

ence of chief ministers of north-east on export promotion. Speaking to newsmen at Raj Bhavan, Hegde said the Union government was aware of the need to upgrade the Guwahati Airport to international standards.

Hegde admitted that despite its export potential, the region as a whole has been so far neglected. He, however, asserted that the Centre was keen to promote trade and commerce in the region. "The feeling of neglect, of being left out and not

Dying to live

The dead come alive in Uttar Pradesh

Shortly after her husband's death 25 years ago, Jhulari Devi was declared "dead". Fudging records in connivance with revenue officials, her relatives grabbed the two *bighas* of land owned by her husband. Authorities even issued a death certificate. Since then, 84-year-old Jhulari has been running from pillar to post, trying to prove that she is alive. Till date, she has not made any headway.

"It was only after I was thrown out of my own house and prevented from tilling my land that I realised what had befallen me. Even then, I could never imagine I would not be able to prove them wrong in 25 years," moans the frail woman who has lost all hope of becoming "alive" once again in the revenue records. But, Jhulari Devi is not the odd one out. In Uttar Pradesh, a group of such "dead" persons recently staged a demonstration to prove that they were very much alive.

Under the banner of Uttar Pradesh Mitak Sangh (UPMS), the "dead" persons gathered outside the legislative Assembly on 7 June demanding to be recognised as "alive". UPMS members pointed out that official revenue records had been manipulated to describe them as "dead". They also alleged that properties owned by them were transferred in the names of their scheming relatives. This land-grabbing was rampant in the highly feudal eastern UP. "A

being involved in the development process should be erased and the state governments should also come forward with definite strategies to boost this sector," Hegde said, adding that it was not the responsibility of the Centre alone.

Admitting transportation bottlenecks and other problems in the region, Hegde said that the matter had already been taken up at the appropriate level and measures were being taken to reopen the old land and rail routes used by the British along the border areas. He added that the deputy director of foreign trade would be specially drafted to promote exports. The Union minister disclosed that a high-level delegation from Bangladesh was due to arrive in New Delhi on the second week of June to discuss an increase in the number of inland water ports to facilitate trade and commerce between the two countries.

Pointing out that the region lagged behind despite its tremendous growth potential, Hegde said that problems peculiar to north-east should be addressed with a different perspective, considering the fact that the region was a national asset. Suggesting several short-term measures for the development of trade in the region, Prafulla Mahanta asked Hegde to request the concerned authorities in China, Bangladesh, Thailand, Myanmar and Bhutan to set up their consulates in Guwahati and opening new border trading points.

Expressing the hope that the North Eastern Council (NEC) will play a major role in the creation of infrastructure and export promotion, Mahanta urged Hegde to formulate a region-specific EXIM policy to provide incentives. •

Nileep Chandan/Guwahati

proper investigation can bring out thousands of such cases," said UPMS leader Lal Bihari.

The 18 long years that it took Lal Bihari to prove he is alive made him form UPMS. "In 1976, a few of my cousins colluded with land record officials to show me as

UP IN ARMS: UPMS members demonstrating in Lucknow



DISASTER

Going up in flames

Another devastating fire kills at least 50 people in Old Delhi

Being the capital city, it is usual for Delhi to have no respite from the political heat. But India's City No.1 seems to be fast turning into a veritable fire trap. On 31 May, a huge fire devastated large areas of Lal Kuan, near Chandni Chowk. Lal Kuan is a congested area in old Delhi. That old Delhi is susceptible to fires is proven once again because this is the seventh major fire in the Walled City in the last five years.

Residents and shopowners in the area claim that this is by far the worst fire they have ever witnessed. Devastation started after an explosion took place inside New Aligarh Transport House, where highly inflammable chemicals were stored, allegedly without a licence.

Pramod Kumar, businessman, felt that the fire was completely devastating. Kumar's shop was partially burnt and his brother sustained injuries. "On 31 May, around 3.40 pm, a ball of fire came out like a missile from the New Aligarh Transport House. It soon leapt up to about 15 to 16 feet. The temperature must have been close to 900 degrees. The ball of fire first hit the shops located across the transport house before

'dead'. For the next 18 years, I moved from one place to another to prove the records wrong and eventually succeeded in 1994," Lal Bihari told *Starline*. "I even contested parliamentary elections against two former Prime Ministers, V.P. Singh and Rajiv Gandhi, with this sole aim of making the authorities recognise that I was not dead," he pointed out.

He pleaded that if the election commission declared him as 'alive', the same should be followed by the land officials. And in case he were to be declared 'dead', the election should be considered null and void. But his voice went unheard and his plea was regarded as a publicity stunt.

He was finally brought to life in 1994 when the District magistrate of Azamgarh, Hamsa Prasad Varma, declared him alive. But even now, Lal Bihari has not been able to bring the guilty to book. Later, Lal Bihari admitted that he was not alone. There were others like Bansi Prasad, Ram Lal Yadav, Sunderi Devi, Anwar Ali, Ram Prasad, Nukku Yadav, Ram Raj and several others who met the same fate.

The UPMS has played a number of protests before the Governor. The members have submitted a petition asking into the "racket involving systematic manipulation of land and revenue records to deprive the farmers of their rights of their legitimate rights."

UPMS members complain that there is no one to listen to their woes. For a change, however, some steps are determined to be taken.

Shivani Prakash/Lucknow

High anxiety

Suspense and mystery become major attractions on Zee

There's one slot that Zee's nurtured and made a success of: it is that of the 'stand-alone' hour: i.e. a piece of fiction which sometimes spills into an hour, instead of the usual half-hour, and wraps up in one or two episodes. It began with *Rishtey* (Fridays, 8.30 pm) which, as the name suggests, was all about relationships. It is currently one of Zee's most-watched series. Its popularity proves that when it comes to love, in any and all guises, we're all suckers: more to the point because it keeps changing directors and actors, there is continuing freshness about it. It offers up the unexpected pleasure of catching an actor in a different turn. A couple of weeks ago, Divya Seth, who is usually seen hosting talk shows and mindless game shows (she's also been stuck in an embittered wife mode for five years in a long-playing serial), turned up playing a single mother with a couple of growing daughters.

It was nice because it gave Divya an opportunity to get



DIFFERENT ROLE: Divya Seth

into the skin of a completely different character, in a radically different look. There she was, wearing a short skirt and a spunky, downtown Mumbai attitude, as she faced up to some louts who harass her girls.

Both *X-Zone*, (Thursday, 9.30 pm) and *Saturday Suspense* (8.30 pm) also divvy up episodes between directors, saving us from the monotony of style. If you are an *Aahat*-watcher, you are familiar with B.P. Singh's signature tune. But *X-Zone*, which also deals broadly with the supernatural and the paranormal, can spring a surprise on you because of the change in direction. Last week's edition about a haunted village starred Shyam Benegal's protegee-turned-popstar Rajeshwari Sachdev and turned out to be quite watchable.

And *Saturday Suspense*, which concerns itself primarily with murder and mayhem, often packs in more quality acting than most of the other fiction on the channel. •

engulfing the shops adjacent to it," Kumar recollected.

Around 15 shops were gutted in the devastation which also spread to a nearby nursing home. Local residents came forward to help move the patients to safer places. Said Pramod Kumar: "The police and fire brigade arrived after 35 to 40 minutes. But the fire had destroyed everything within 20 minutes." Passers-by tried to save as many as they could. But the flames were so severe that many people were charred to death on the spot.

The victims were rushed to the nearby Lok Nayak Jay Prakash (LNJP) Hospital. Although the official death toll was 50, residents claimed that the number of dead is much more than that. "I know at least 40 people who have died. Then what about the passers-by or people travelling in rickshaws and the rickshaw-pullers themselves who were caught in the fire? I can assure you, many more have perished than the number claimed by the government," said Mausmoddin, who owns a magazine stall in the area. Local residents also claimed that the media followed up only those victims who were admitted to the LNJP Hospital while there were many who were admitted to at least three different hospitals. "Nobody knows what became of them," said an angry resident.

Such was the nature of fire that most of the victims suffered more than 75 per cent burns, and some received as much as 100 per cent burns. Lala Amarnath Gupta had his business in the area for the last 54 years. According to him, this was the worst fire he had ever seen. Ram Avatar, one of his helpers, was consumed by the flames and Gupta himself had a providential escape.

According to Gupta, as the fire was caused by chemicals, it created greater havoc. "It spread so fast that people got no opportunity to escape. Even the pigeons on the trees could not fly away," Gupta pointed out. "The material losses I have suffered can be replaced. But what about Ram Avatar?", he lamented.

Although the owners of the New Aligarh Transport House, Kalyan Singh and Subhash Rastogi have been arrested, the residents would like the authorities to probe further. They have not ruled out the possibility of a foul play. "I have seen a lot of fires in my life, but this was different. A fire does not spread as far as 100 feet," pointed out Waliuddin who makes automobile spare parts in the area.

Local residents are doing everything to ensure that such a devastation does not take place again. They want other transport houses — most of which operate without a licence — chemical and paint shops closed. M. Salman Faruqui, president of the Social Welfare and Cultural Society of the area wants the authorities to set up a fire station. "This is a highly congested area because of which the fire brigade takes a long time to reach," Faruqui points out.

The residents also see a silver lining in the dark clouds left behind the devastation. Fire, no doubt, is a great leveller and in communally-sensitive Lal Kuan it has considerably defused the underlying tension between the Hindus and the Muslims. Mutual loss has brought them closer to each other. "There is a growing feeling of brotherhood and cooperation among the Hindus and the Muslims after the tragedy," says Mohammad Idrees, a resident of the area.

It will take some time before things are back to normal and people pick themselves up. As Lal Babu Sen, a rickshaw-puller in the area says: "Death can come anytime. But we have to go on with the business of living." •

Garima Kalra/New Delhi



SUNDAY WEEK

KUSUM BHANDARI

BEGINNING 20 JUNE, 1999

ARIES

(21 March-20 April)

You should seriously consider disbanding unsuccessful working groups or reorganizing them on a totally different basis. Little gestures of affection towards loved ones or taking them out on a special trip will strengthen the relationship. You should now give rather than take.

TAURUS

(21 April-20 May)

You should now be able to twist other people around your little finger. Your charm can melt the hardest of hearts. You will be riding high in the popularity stakes. If you encounter problems professionally, try to obtain the guidance of people experienced in such matters and save time and expenses.

GEMINI

(21 May-20 June)

Don't rest on the laurels of any recent success in routine business affairs. There is still scope for upping profits and winning new clients. But business expenses may suddenly rise. The ability to make up your mind more rapidly can save time and expense. Romantic proposals may come your way.

CANCER

(21 June-20 July)

This is probably the worst time possible to think of changing jobs. It is likely that if you stay in your current position, you will reap a rich harvest from efforts you have shown in the past. Order and harmony will be difficult to preserve at home.

LEO

(21 July-20 August)

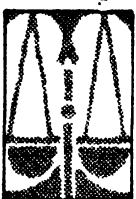
Something you have done to help may backfire and you wonder if it is all worth the effort. Don't mix business with pleasure. Advertising or trying to impress people seems unlikely to work. You may be bit depressed at losing a special companion. A fresh start is possibly what you need.



LIBRA

(21 September-20 October)

It is a good week for presenting a more attractive company image to the public. Unexpected benefits can come from attending business conferences. People met under such circumstances can help to advance your interests. Ruling on property matters may give you something to cheer about.



SAGITTARIUS

(21 November-20 December)

Your emotions can be aroused and you feel resentful about something. Perhaps you should cut down on outings and socializing. A reminder from the past can almost frighten you. At least it can make you think twice before getting involved. Someone may try to put you off. Don't take it to heart.

CAPRICORN

(21 December-20 January)

Extrême caution is advised in handling of professional and business matters. It will be easier to misread situations you are presented with, so that wrong moves are made. Long journeys can be dull and tiring. In-laws may come looking for trouble. Emotional outbursts may be hard to avoid.

AQUARIUS

(21 January-20 February)

Close acquaintances can broach subjects or say things you have asked them to keep quiet about. Their irresponsible actions can land you in trouble with higher authorities. Storm clouds may be collecting over the domestic scene. Household members may insist on having their own way.

PISCES

(21 February-20 March)

With other people off your back for a while, there should be plenty of opportunity for relaxation. Riddles can be solved and fundamental problems sorted out. Breaking with restrictive relationships will bring a greater sense of freedom.

VIRGO

(21 August-20 September)

Employers or superiors are likely to become disillusioned, if they see you working in a purely mechanical way. You should now be showing such people just what you are made of. Romance may have to take second place to other duties or commitments.

SCORPIO

(21 October-20 November)

You are likely to be in a mood when you enjoy quiet and privacy. Time spent in seclusion can be used to absorb recent experiences and learn the lessons that both mistakes and success have to demonstrate. Your aesthetic sense will be well tuned.

Patterns in the air

Now that finance secretary Vijay Kelkar is going to the IMF, it is Washington, not Delhi, which will have the benefit of pleasantly perfumed corridors.

That Kelkar is crazy about cricket is well known. But he has some kind of shrine or



Vijay Kelkar: off to the IMF

altar in his room to a deity known only to him. He lights pleasant-smelling *agarbattis* both in his own room and in his ante-room. Being artistically-minded, he probably likes to see patterns in the smoke wafting in the air.

One wishes he could read the smoke signals being sent up by the Indian economy as competently.

New address

A young, new joint secretary in the finance ministry who takes care of the now defunct India Investment Centre (IIC), appears to be enjoying his posting.

In his new job as one who looks after foreign trade and petroleum, he has managed to get a guest house of a

HEARD AT NORTH BLOCK

In George Fernandes we had a bull in a china shop. Now we have a flea in a china shop.

A BUREAUCRAT COMMENTING ON RAM JETHMALANI'S APPOINTMENT AS LAW MINISTER

major oil company allotted as his official residence. So no waiting in queue for the housing pool to let him know about the availability of a house in Delhi. A process which every harassed bureaucrat faces on being transferred to the capital.

But solicitous colleagues are wondering how much time he will actually have to enjoy his new residence. Because as the IIC secretary, he has the chance to travel all over the world to invite investment to India.

It is another matter though that no exercise has been undertaken by the finance ministry to evaluate precise-

ly how much of the foreign investment in India is due to the exertions of the IIC.

However, this exercise is not to be undertaken now. More so because the secretary is distantly related to the finance minister.

Communication snag

Does the shifting out of the communications minister, Jagmohan, indicate more money for the government or less?

While Jagmohan was moved, allegedly at the instance of private phone operators who pleaded before the government that they could not pay the Rs 3,700 crore in licence fee as ordered by Jag-



Jagmohan: no more calls

mohan, or surrender their licences, the government managed to get Rs 1,000 crore in its kitty which Jagmohan managed to collect before he left Sanchar Bhavan.

Now will the operators pay up at all? More important, will they be asked to pay up? That's the key to the imbroglio which cost Jagmohan his job. •

BAROMETER

War and the Indian economy



Inflation: Although this indicates that there is no demand, one reason why the rate of inflation is going down could be the glut in agriculture, which in turn is pushing down food prices. On the whole, not a bad thing for the economy though it is best if it stabilises soon.



Sensex: Nobody knows why. But for some mysterious reason Indian Air Force pilot Nachiketa's release sent the Sensex zooming through the roof. Clearly the markets want peace. So, it is hard to predict how it will behave.



Exports: Against a predicted and projected growth rate of 20 per cent last year, this year saw only a 3.17 per cent rate of growth. However, exports are going up and it won't be difficult to beat last year's performance.



Foreign Investments: US markets are doing well. So India is reaping the spin-off. Foreign institutional investors want to park their money somewhere. India offers good buys. FI's money is burning a hole in their pockets. The only problem is: how long it will stay in India.

Identity crisis

At the Sunday Express conference held by George Fernandez, the defence minister made it clear to the press that he was going to answer any question on Kargil because he was addressing the issue as a leader of the Samata Party.

And even though he just wouldn't take any questions on the war. Until someone asked him: "Sir, about the meeting of the NDA..." And uncharacteristically testy, Fernandez said: "I tell you. No question about the defence ministry..."

"But sir..." whined the reporter. "I only wanted to ask you about the meeting of the National Democratic Alliance, of which you are drafting the manifesto." At which Fernandez had the grace to look sheepish. He confessed that he had been talking about the National Alliance. **Kishor Vasishth**

One flow over Lebanon

The ministry of civil aviation has opened another airport with great fanfare: the Lebanon airport.



J.M. Advani inaugurating the airport

HEARD IN THE AICC

We don't know who has the contract to drive the Lahore bus. But given the killings in Kargil, it has to be same drivers who are in charge of the Red Line and Blue Line buses in Delhi.

A CONGRESS WORKER ON THE BJP'S FAILED BUS DIPLOMACY

which was inaugurated by home minister J.K. Advani last week.

The journey in the future

tion was impressive. Many of the Madhya Pradesh MPs were there and no one said it was a political exercise.

KNOW YOUR CHIEF MINISTERS



The latest in an occasional series

1) Chandrababu Naidu

He was born in Chittoor District, studied at the Viswavidyalaya University where he got an MA in Economics. Married SMT. Rama Rao's daughter long before he entered politics.

He became a minister in 1978. Naidu managed a surprise election to the Chandrababu Assembly constituency. He was lost 23. At 30, he was already a minister in the N.T. Aravamdo Cabinet. In 1989, contested from Mahabub constituency after NTR started the Telugu Desam Party. Was secretary general and coordinated TDP affairs. In 1994, when NTR's government was dismissed, and returned after elections, he became finance minister. After NTR's untimely death he became chief minister at 48.

He showed phenomenal knowledge. Shot to prominence in 1996 the Lok Sabha where all the parties in the United Front coalition thought Chandrababu Naidu was the best man to coordinate the UF. When the BJP government came to power after the fall of the United Front, Naidu got the TDP to support the BJP in return for giving him the leadership of the Lok Sabha. He is a close ally of the Congress but is said to be independent of the Congress Party.

He visited the United States to meet NTR only. He visited the United States to meet NTR only. He visited the United States to meet NTR only.

He visited the United States to meet NTR only. He visited the United States to meet NTR only. He visited the United States to meet NTR only.

because it has no other.

The only one who made a statement was Kishor Vasishth. In an article he mentioned the fact that the only one who made a statement was Kishor Vasishth. In an article he mentioned the fact that the only one who made a statement was Kishor Vasishth.

Up for grabs

At the meeting of the World Economic Forum, Naidu, last year, said (Naidu) Naidu told Naidu that there was a very big chance of the government of Naidu. Naidu told Naidu that there was a very big chance of the government of Naidu. Naidu told Naidu that there was a very big chance of the government of Naidu.



Vijay Kelkar will be the new finance secretary

Vijay Kelkar out of the way. Singh was telling everyone last week that he was going to take over as finance secretary.

He participated in a PETA seminar where the guest of honour was the finance minister. He also visited the press on the (largely) mythical achievements of the task force on infrastructure. In short, he kept a high profile in the last week, believing that he is the Chosen One.

However, as SUNDAY went to press, it seemed that he was going to be pipped at the post by another colleague. Watch this space for more on that story. •

Shooting his mouth off

Inder Kumar Gujral is making a nuisance of himself for the BJP government and foreign office.

After his television interview and various statements — including one exhorting the PM to drop his defence



Inder Gujral: embarrassing the government

minister — Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee called foreign minister Jaswant Singh and said: "Arre bhai, woh Gujral saheb..."

PMO sources said Jaswant Singh's customary equanimity nearly deserted him. He drew himself up to full height and said, "Prime Minister, I don't think either the Indian or the Pakistani foreign office suffers such a poverty of intellect that we have to turn NGO to diplomacy."

The PM smiled and nothing more was said about Inder Gujral.

Behind the scenes

How did UN secretary general Kofi Annan issue a statement offering UN intervention to resolve the conflict between India and Pakistan?

India was more than taken aback when the suggestion

HEARD AT 24 AKBAR ROAD

With P.A. Sangma and Sharad Pawar heading it, it should be called the MCP, not the NCP.

A CONGRESS WORKER COMMENTING ON THE FACT THAT SHARAD PAWAR'S NEW PARTY HAD NO WOMEN MEMBERS

first came, the first reaction from the UNSG's office, that the UN intervene to resolve the problem between India and Pakistan.

It was so uncharacteristic that discreet enquiries were launched to find out how the UNSG had suddenly done a volte face. In the past, successive UNSGs have been more than correct about honouring India's assertion that Kashmir is part of India and no one else can tell this nation what to do about one of its states.

CHECK-LIST

Party positions: what party newspapers are saying about Kargil

■ **Sandesh:** The Congress party organ says that while the government is guilty of grave lapses in the handling of Kargil, it should not be attacked until the infiltrators are sent back, the LoC not permitted to be altered. The Kashmir issue be restricted to the Simla Accord and internationalisation of Kashmir prevented. Only after the situation is under control will the Congress criticise the BJP.

■ **People's Democracy:** In a front page article, the general secretary of the CPI(M), Harkishan Singh Surjeet says, It is now clear that the Lahore bus trip by the BJP created the illusion that things had cleared up between India and Pakistan. The government was not vigilant and late in acting. Now, it must prevent escalation. The Kashmir question should not be raked up again.

■ **Panchajanya:** The BJP organ says that Pakistan should remember that India no longer has a government which is content with talking and not acting. Nor is it a government of people who offered peace to Pakistan when Indian soldiers had cleared India's way to Lahore and were knocking on Lahore's doors.

■ **New Age:** The organ of the Communist Party of India says that George Fernandes should resign as defence minister, accepting responsibility for security lapse in the country; the situation should not be allowed to escalate and the BJP should not resort to jingoism.



Kofi Annan: caught unaware

And then it came out. That the UNSG had not even seen the statement which was issued on his behalf by a member of his staff who was...a Pakistani.

The misunderstanding has since been cleared up.

Out of context

SUNDAY's Man Friday (because he writes *Mani-talk* on Fridays). Mani Shankar Aiyar should watch his back. His detractors in the Congress are watching every move he makes.

Word has got round that Aiyar wants a ticket from East Delhi. That he has only a ghost of a chance of winning from this seat is another matter. And even that is contingent upon help from Sheila Dikshit.

Realising this, his enemies in the Congress are now telling Dikshit that he should never be given a ticket. "Remember what he called you Madam?" they ask. A Gangster's Moli, that's what.

In one of his more entertaining columns in SUNDAY, Aiyar had indeed referred to Dikshit as a moli after she left P.V. Narasimha Rao and the Congress to join the Tihar Congress. But that was in a certain context. Reviving that now only means that someone wants to shaft Mani Shankar Aiyar's political chances.

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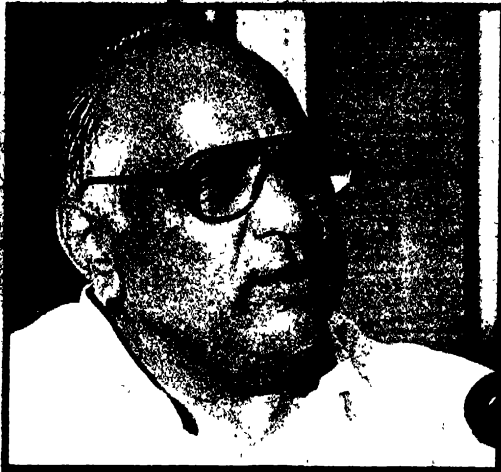
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MORE ON KARGIL

SUNDAY



Sharad Pawar

Front facade

**Regional leaders form
yet another anti-Congress,
anti-BJP front. And**

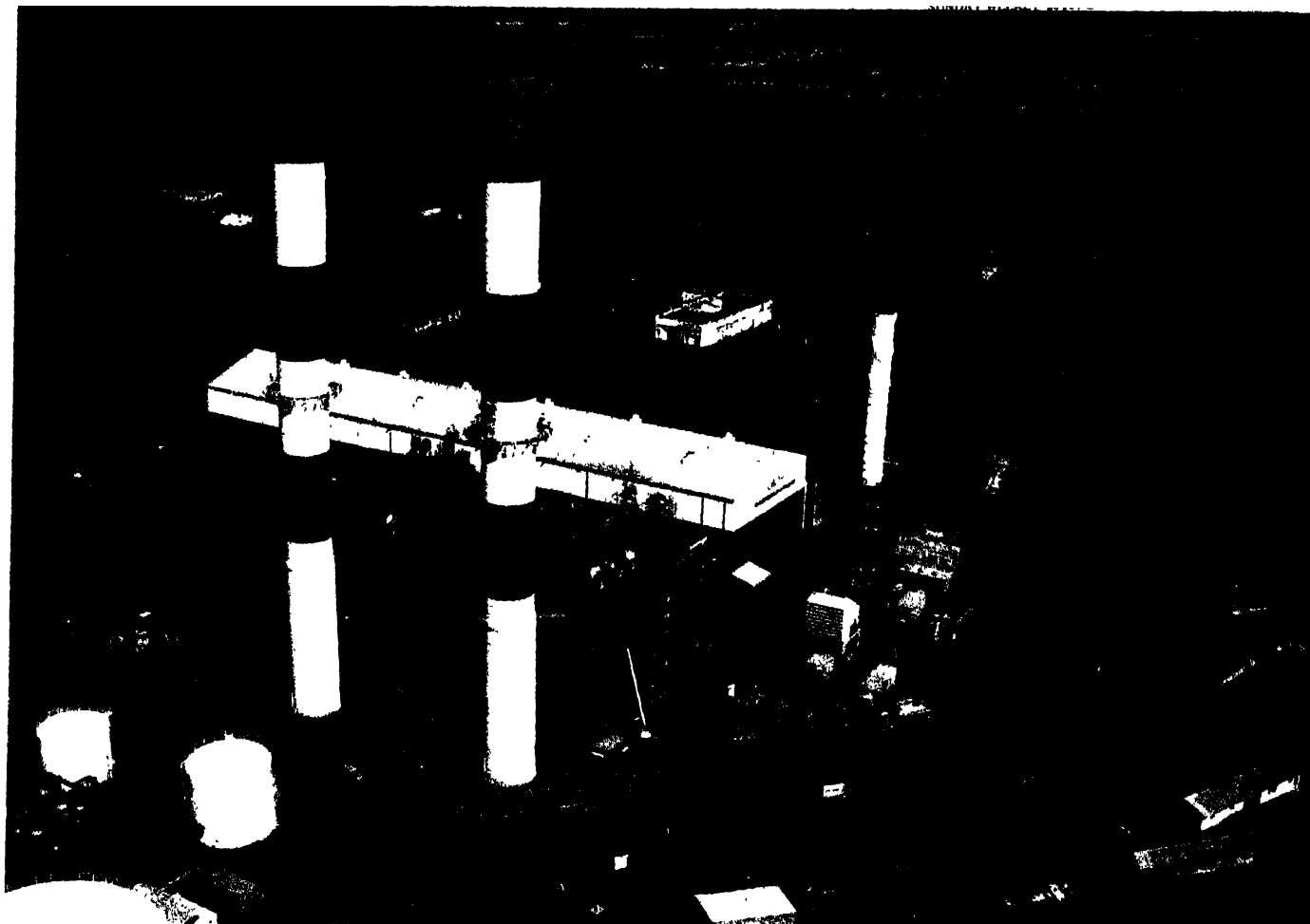


Mulayam Singh Yadav



P.A. Sangma

**each one wants
to become Prime
Minister**



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Letters.....	4
Sight and Sound.....	6
Jeen.....	7
Profile.....	26
Spotlight.....	34
Khaas Baat.....	39
Sunday Sports.....	56
News.....	59
Sunday Week.....	63
Business Diary.....	64
Random Notes.....	65
Delhi Diary.....	66



NEWSBEAT

Bus to Bangladesh

The Calcutta-Dhaka service hits the road..... 8

AVIATION

Waiting list

Attempts by the caretaker government to reorganise the finances of Indian Airlines run into trouble..... 32

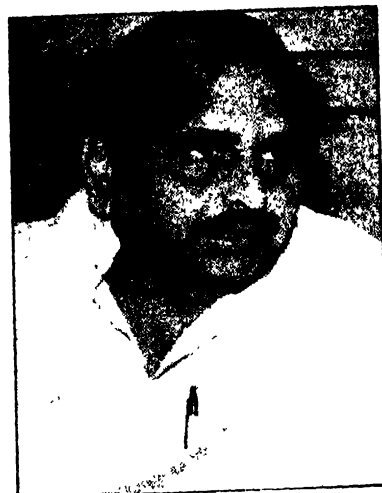
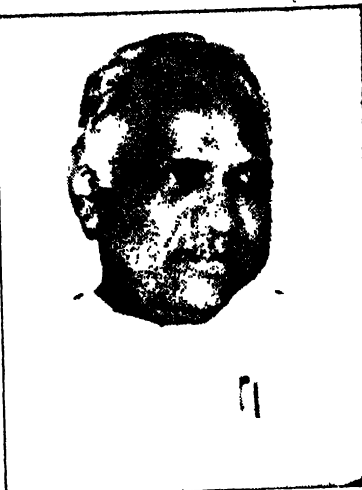
COLUMNS

THE SOUTH BLOCK

Inder Malhotra..... 13

MALIK ON MEDIA

Amita Malik..... 58



COVER STORY 14

Front facade

Regional leaders form yet another anti-Congress, anti-BJP front. And each one wants to become Prime Minister

PERSONALITY 36

Azza!

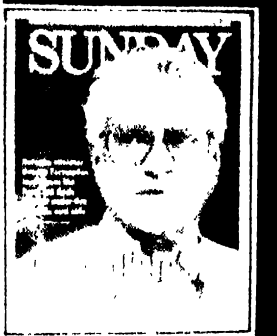
In defence of the Indian skipper



40

Change of heart

Former dacoits transform a West Bengal village



In the line of fire

George Fernandes insists his comments on Kargil were not off the cuff, but were well thought-out and decided upon after a brain-storming Cabinet meeting (*A Soldier's story*, 13-19 June). But there are hardly any takers. Fernandes has desperately kept out of public view any intelligence report about the breach of national security taking place that might jeopardise the domestic image of his government.

It appears from everything we have heard since the incursions in the Kargil sector became public that the government just did not take

into consideration any possible Pakistani military action in the northern sector. Defence minister must shoulder the blame for the military build-up on the Kargil sector. *Kiran Mathur, Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh)*

■ It is true that George Fernandes seems to have become the nation's favourite punching bag. Nothing he does seems to please anyone and he's simply passed off as a conman who makes promises he doesn't keep. And the Kargil affair seems to have made George-bashing the national pastime.

Fernandes has in the past shown his political acumen and his abilities as an organiser. He has made and unmade many trade unions and political parties during his tenure as a politician. Now, as defence minister if he is trying to bring about peace between India and Pakistan in his own way, with honour and dignity, why only criticize him? Give the man a break, he deserves it.

Aditi Shaw, New Delhi

George Fernandes: to err is human



Vote or not to vote

What 'alien' Sonia Gandhi has admitted in her letter is only half-truth (*The Challenge*, 23-29 May). The Congress faces a challenge to its very existence, not by the deserters, but by her own political gimmicks. She would neither quit her party nor the country to engage herself in good works.

Sonia, Jayalalitha, Advani and Laloo Prasad Yadav have utterly ruined political ethics and the sanctity of polls has become obliterated beyond recognition in their rabid craze for power. Like Prince Hamlet, the tragic hero who bemoaned there was something rotten in the state of Denmark, the voting majority of Indian democracy is worn-out because of these tyrannical political chieftains. It is high time people ask themselves whether they really need a democracy to serve their ambition when evil forces are on the prowl masquerading as politicians and busy converting every elected government into a hellish torment and disappointment for the voters, now left in a Hamletian dilemma: to vote or not to vote.

R. Ramasami, Tiruvannamalai (Tamil Nadu)

■ Sonia Gandhi was a unifying force in the Congress till the "letter-bomb" was dropped by Sharad Pawar and co. Now Sonia's credentials have thrown open a controversy. The rebellion against Sonia and the issue of her Italian origin raised from within the party dealt a severe blow to the image of the Congress.

Doubtless Pawar's rebellion has weakened the Congress. The points raised by the rebel troika have relevance for India's polity. Pawar's pointed query whether one

single competent Indian to lead this country could not be found from among crores of Indians has touched the pride of Indians and their self-respect.

Sonia as a citizen is above criticism. But when she aspires for prime ministership of India, the issue of her foreign origin is sure to crop up. Now, the questions remain how the Congress faces up to the challenge thrown open by the Pawar-Sangma-Anwar groupie. *L. Rohini, Tiruchy (Tamil Nadu)*

Law of the jungle

The violent incident of Beur Central jail in Patna assaulting the CBI officials and disrupting the identification parade clearly shows how the criminals escape



Pappu Yadav: ruling the roost

from the rule of law in our country (*War of wards*, 16-22 May). A don like Pappu Yadav hiring a contract killer to get rid of an MLA is no big news as Bihar has become an uncivilised and barbarious state.

Sorrowfully, people like Pappu Yadav abound in Bihar. And they are ruling the roost in cahoots with the political leaders. These goons think they can perpetrate any kind of crime and get away with it.

S. Halar, Ithaler (Tamil Nadu)

High stakes?

The expelled leaders — Sharad Pawar, P.A. Sangma and Tariq Anwar — have formed a new political party and have named it as the Nationalist Congress Party (*The rebel*, 30 May—6 June). It may be recalled that in August 1934, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, the father-figure of Hindu Mahasabha — a Hindu communalist party — had resigned from the Congress, which according to him, was against Hindu interest. He along with M.S. Aney had formed the Congress Nationalist Party and contested the central Assembly elections in November 1934 winning less than a dozen seats.

Dr M. Hashim Kidwai, New Delhi

Wanted restraint

A war-like situation at the Kargil sector has caused innumerable casualties to Indian defence forces (*Can India and Pakistan ever be friends?* 6—12 June). We shouldn't forget the services of Squadron Leader Ajay Ahuja and Major Sarvanan, who have laid down their lives for the sake of country's honour. As a mark of respect, to all these soldiers, there should be total restraint in celebrating our cricket team's win over Pakistan at Old Trafford.

Nirupam Haldar, Calcutta (West Bengal)

Pak perfidy

This refers to the story *Battle for Kargil* (6—12 June). Pakistan's involvement in Kargil is now an open secret. As fierce fighting continues in Kargil sector, so far 242 Pakistani regulars had been killed.

We see a reflection of

Pakistani barbarism with the handing over of mutilated bodies of Indian soldiers. What further evidence one needs to show Pakistan's naked and shameless involvement in the invasion of Kargil? It has been rightly pointed out that the Pakistani forces have violated the LoC through systematic infiltration.

Our caretaker government shouldn't put the army under pressure to hasten the roll-back operation. It is a Himalayan task and it may take three months to recapture peaks. With the onset of winter, the intruders will become more desperate. The army should be provided with battlefield surveillance equipment forthwith. It is at that time our soldiers in Kargil will be able to choke the enemy.

Onkar Chopra, Ludhiana (Punjab)

Looks aren't deceptive

I was appalled to read the profile on P.A. Sangma (*Cheers!*, 30 May—5 June). In your enthusiasm to make Sonia Gandhi 'Indian', you have steeped so low as to state that Sangma would find it difficult to prove that he is



P.A. Sangma: Indian by birth

Indian because he looks Chinese and is also unintelligible in both English and Hindi. Obviously you have no difficulty in accepting an Italian accent, but the north-east is in a different galaxy for you.

If an 'educated' Indian's mindset is such as this, do you blame the common man from the north-east feeling alienated from the mainstream of Indian life? Incidentally, in these days of the World Cup, we rejoice when even second generation Indians fail the Norman Tebitt test. Are others so different or do Indians only remain loyal to their country of origin?

S.K. Dutta, Calcutta (West Bengal)

Blinkered vision

This has reference to the column headlined *The*

Moopanar of Maharashtra (6—12 June). I am at a loss whether to say kudos or ask 'quo vadis' Congress(I). In the JMK (Jayalalitha, Moopanar and Karunanidhi) tangle, an otherwise erudite columnist seems to have gone a bit soft in his cerebral exercise. What is his role in the game of corruption — that of a referee without a whistle? If the idea was to paint Moopanar black, then the subject doesn't warrant such verbal diarrhoea.

The columnist bemoans what a derisory objective for a nation of 1000 million people. Exactly, the columnist, the same holds good for the likes of you, Jairam Ramesh, Rajesh Pilot, Kamal Nath, Madhav Rao Scindia, Girija Vyas — just to name a few. All of these leaders have the potential to become full-blown national leaders capable of decision making, dissent, in the interest of the nation. Then why is this sycophancy?

After Rajiv Gandhi's tragic assassination, Sonia Gandhi rejected the offer to become the president of Congress(I). She would have risen in the esteem of the people of India had she gracefully declined contending for prime ministership. But, sycophants have their compulsions to perpetrate dynastic rule even eight years after Rajiv's death. "The king is dead, long live the queen." As for Sonia's foreign origin, it is only fair to say "let people decide" as she is eligible constitutionally.

Dr K.U. Bhanu, Madras (Tamil Nadu)

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Dev Anand
Actor-director



Venukshani
Actor

Contributed by Shyamal Kumar Manna, Calcutta (West Bengal)

MILESTONES

ANNOUNCED: an electoral tie-up between the Nationalist Congress Party and the Sahawadi Party. At a joint press conference on 17 June, Sharad Pawar and Mulayam Singh Yadav said that they'd try and rope in all the secular forces opposed to the Congress and the BJP.

DISCHARGED: Jayalalitha, AIADMK chief, in the multi-crore coal import case by the Special Court II on 16 June. On 18 June however, the Tamil Nadu government filed an appeal with Madras High Court challenging the special court's order.

ELECTED: Pratapsinh Rane, former Goa CM, as



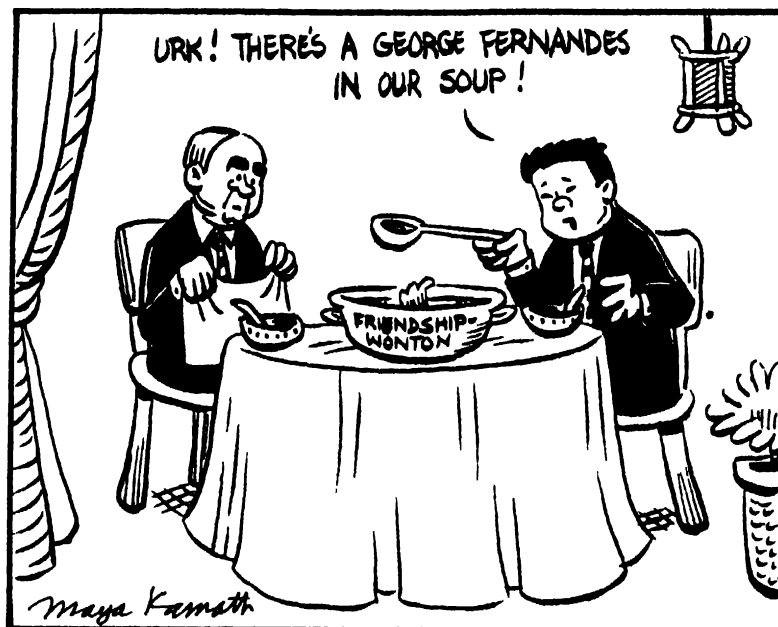
Speaker of the Goa Assembly. Chief minister Luizinho Faleiro proposed Rane's name; Ravi Naik, a minister in Faleiro's Cabinet, seconded it.

DIED: Vengala Rao, former Andhra Pradesh CM, at Hyderabad on 12 June.

AWARDED: to Prof. C.N.R. Rao, president, Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research, the centenary medal and lectureship by the Royal Society of Chemistry of London.

APPOINTED: Tom Vaddakan as AICC media secretary. Earlier he was in charge of Newswatch, the in-house news monitoring cell.

SIGHT & SOUND



MAYA KAMATH/THE ASIAN AGE

■ There will be no withdrawal, the jehad will go on till the Indian forces are ousted from Kashmir.

HAFIZ MOHAMMED SAEED, chief of the fundamentalist outfit Lashkar-e-Toiba, warning the Pakistani leadership against any compromise

■ No self-respecting man would go after this fiasco.

SUNIL GANGOPADHYAY, Bengali novelist, who was earlier denied permission by the ministry of external affairs to travel on the first Calcutta-Dhaka bus

■ He deserves to be in jail because he is directly or indirectly involved in all the scandals in Bihar.

SUSHIL KUMAR MODI, leader of the Opposition in the Bihar Assembly, on RJD chief Laloo Prasad Yadav



■ We don't have to think the opposition is tough — just that, we are better than them.

WASIM AKRAM, Pakistan cricket captain, to his players before they took on Australia in the 20 June final at Lord's

■ They talk about free trade, but do not even practise fair trade.

RAHUL BAJAJ, CII president, criticising the US and other developed countries

■ I know I will get crucified by a billion Indian cricket-crazed lunatics from around the world, but cricket leaves me cold.

SONALI BENDRE, film actress

■ It's too early in my career to be talking about an image. The best image is the image of quality.

AKSHAYE KHANNA, film actor

SEEN

The snake charmer

Serpents are his passion and his mission is to save them



THE PROTECTOR: *Salim helps doctors treat a wounded snake*

It was a six-foot long, black King Cobra. Badly mauled. But Mohammad Salim, who caught the reptile from a house in the Idgah hills locality of Bhopal, was determined to save its life. He took it to a veterinary hospital for administering antibiotic and painkilling injections.

After a week the cobra hissed back to life. The series of injections and copious bandaging had worked. It was the 10,501st snake that 30-year-old Salim had caught and saved.

On 2 June, Salim got a call on his pager from a constable from Idgah hills. A cobra had been sighted in his house and he needed help. By the time Salim reached the spot, the family had already made an unsuccessful attempt to trap the snake. They had also tried to kill it with a heavy iron rod. After an hour's struggle, Salim caught the injured snake. "It was furious, around 70 years of age and full of venom," says Salim. At the hospital, a concerned Salim had enquired about the possibility of giving bottled glucose saline to the cobra.

Though Salim is not a professional snake charmer, the last 16 years of his life has revolved around these slimy, slithering creatures. He used to be a pan-shop owner till recently, but gave it up after the number of calls increased.

"I've never killed a snake, never in my life...it's the most sacred thing for me after Allah. I release them in

the jungles near Panchmarhi [a hill station about 200 kms from Bhopal]," says Salim. "I've also caught snakes from the houses of 40 ministers and five Governors." He also treats snake-bite cases, but his methods are unconventional. He would ask his patient to drink pure ghee and then to chew some red chillies. So far he has saved about 140 lives. People from even outside the city have approached him for help.

The Bhopal Municipal Corporation recently employed Salim on a monthly salary of Rs 2,500. It has also given him a pager so that people can contact him in cases of emergency.

"I got this art from my *bade abba* — Ammoo Pehelwan," says Salim who is illiterate and a father of five daughters and one son. "He also taught me the art of treating snake bite and about the *jadi-bootiyan* [herbal drugs]."

Salim doesn't charge for either catching snakes or treating snake bite. The man who has caught such deadly creatures as cobras, kraits, vipers and pythons, and was himself bitten as many as six times, makes it a point to see that his catch returns safely to its natural habitat. Snakes are his passion and he always warns up to any information which has to do with them. So that "I can save more lives — of snakes and of people." •

Deshdeep Saxena/Bhopal

The man who has been bitten as many as six times, sees to it that his catch returns safely to its natural habitat

Bus to Bangla

The Calcutta-Dhaka service hits the road

It had always been a dream for all both in Bangladesh and India — a Dhaka-Calcutta direct bus service. The two neighbouring countries are now poised to enter a new phase in their relations, with the formal inauguration of a direct bus service on 19 June. It also marks a watershed in road communication between the neighbours.

The task was a 'politically difficult' one for the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, specially in a country where India-bashing is a popular pastime of the political elements that have now ruled Bangladesh for nearly 23 years. It becomes even more difficult when the so-called ultra-nationalists find, in every little thing, a spectre of Indian hegemony and expansionism.

When a senior journalist of the now-defunct *Dainik Bangla* was asked in the National Press Club about his reaction to the ensuing Dhaka-Calcutta bus service, pat came his reply: "I oppose it politically." When asked why he opposed it 'politically', he said: "This is because I support the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) of Begum Khaleida Zia."

In fact, this is more or less the answer from all quarters which oppose the direct bus link with Calcutta. The detractors have taken it upon themselves to try and barricade the movement of hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshis going over to Calcutta and other cities of India for medical treatment, for higher studies and for travel. "We'll burn to ashes all Indian buses and cars that move through Bangladesh's territory," the mayor of Rajshahi City Corpo-



The direct bus service is being viewed by regular travellers as a positive move in the right direction, aiming at easing the untold sufferings of passengers who visit India by road

ration, Mizanur Rahman Minu, a member of the BNP, went to the extent of saying.

Braving all these threats and warnings, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has gone ahead with her initiative to introduce the Dhaka-Calcutta bus service. In 1997, she had summoned a Cabinet meeting in which the bus service was formally discussed and approved. Sheikh Hasina had taken a cautious stand on the issue, saying that the bus service was meant only to facilitate thousands of Bangladeshis who visit India every year on their way to holy religious sites in Ajmer and elsewhere.

Earlier, a Dhaka-Ajmer direct bus service proposal was dropped because such a route would have required approvals from several Indian states which would have been a lengthy and cumbersome process. Later, it was reduced to the Dhaka-Calcutta route.

Nearly one-and-a-half years after the Cabinet approval, the Dhaka-Calcutta bus service is now becoming a reality. Which means easier times for hundreds of Bangladeshis who had to go through stringent bureaucratic formalities daily at Benapole in Bangladesh and Petrapole in India in order to go to Calcutta and other Indian cities by road. On the Indian side, the journey from Haridaspur checkpoint to

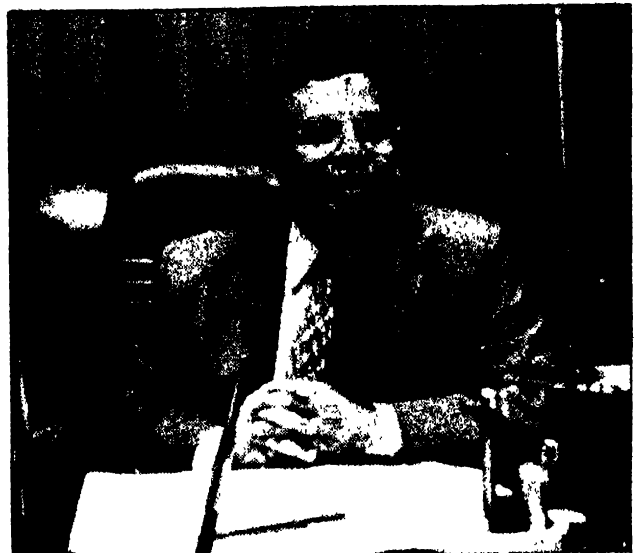
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Officials checking papers at Haridaspur



PRADIP BANYAL



Shafi Sami: the successful operation of the Dhaka-Calcutta bus service will decide the future of the Dhaka-Agartala and Dhaka-Syedpur-Siliguri bus links

Calcutta used to be a harrowing experience. And at the end of it all, the journey to the neighbour's place was not pleasant at all.

The direct bus service is being viewed by regular travellers as a positive move in the right direction, aiming at easing the untold sufferings of passengers who visit India by road. "Now all that I have to do is go to Motijheel in Dhaka to catch a bus and reach Calcutta directly with all formalities completed by Indo-Bangladesh officials on the border specially assigned for the direct bus service," said Tahin Ali, father of a Bangladeshi student studying in Vishwa Bharati in Santiniketan. Similar is the reaction of Karishma Rahman, a housewife who regularly visits Calcutta for health check-ups.

Officials at the Bangladesh foreign ministry are aware of the far-reaching consequences of the Dhaka-Calcutta bus service. Its successful operation will decide the future of Dhaka-Agartala and Dhaka-Syedpur-Siliguri bus services, pointed out foreign secretary Shafi Sami at a news briefing in Dhaka. Sami was Bangladesh's high commissioner to India prior to his present assignment.

The political forces, who had once smelt a rat in the direct bus service, now appear to have become silent. Neither the BNP nor the Jatiya Party headed by former President H.M. Ershad nor the Jamaat-e-Islami have given any hostile reaction to the token operation of the Dhaka-Calcutta bus service on 19 June.

The Jamaat-e-Islami will organise a rally in Dhaka protesting the visit of Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on the issue of Kashmir and the Babri Masjid sacrilege.

The Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, an ally of the ruling Awami League, has become the first political party in Bangladesh to throw its weight behind the bus service, saying that it will help the cause of the passengers.

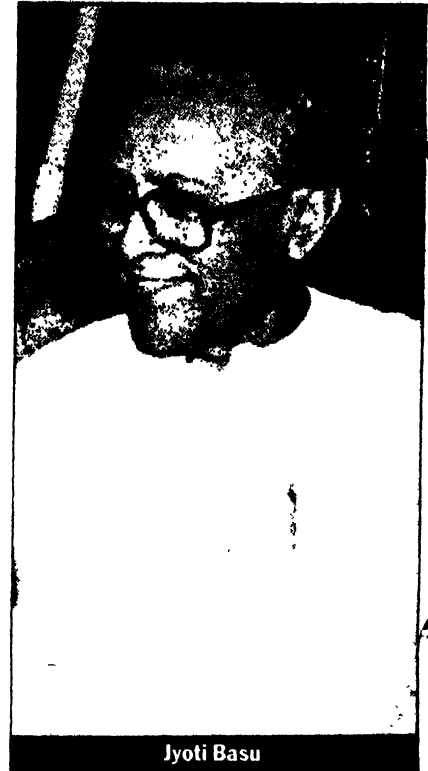
"The Dhaka-Calcutta bus service will not only ease the miseries of the passengers but also help build Indo-



A.B. Vajpayee



Sheikh Hasina



Jyoti Basu

The token bus ride on 19 June was symbolic as the Bangladesh Prime Minister, her Indian counterpart and the West Bengal chief minister received nearly 80 passengers of the two buses coming from Calcutta

Bangladesh friendship and amity through more people-to-people contact," said Nur Alam Ziku, Awami League president, and Hasanul Huq Iru, general secretary of the party in a joint statement. Criticising the detractors of the bus service, they said that these people were the ones who regularly went to Calcutta and Delhi and did business with the Marwaris, but at the same time were creating artificial tension by their comments on the bus service.

Ziku and Iru have demanded relaxation in the visa rules and lower fares so that the common people in Bangladesh could avail of the service. The token ride on 19 June was symbolic as both Prime Ministers, Sheikh Hasina and Atal Behari Vajpayee, and West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu received nearly 80 passengers of the two buses coming from Calcutta. Of the total, 24 will be private passengers and the rest will be part of Indian Prime Minister's entourage.

Even as the buses start plying, the Dhaka-Calcutta road is being upgraded by Indian authorities. According to official sources, the Government of India has already sanctioned Rs 590 million for the construction of a bypass and widening of the road between Petrapole and Calcutta. And with greater involvement from the private sector, the bus service is expected to offer more comfort to the commuters.

Eighty per cent of bus operators on the Dhaka-Calcutta route will be from the private sector in Bangladesh particu-

larly. The two-way bus fare has been fixed at the Bangladeshi Taka or Indian Rupee equivalent of US\$ 22. Both Bangladesh and India have, in the meantime, taken steps to promote regular movement of people by relaxing visa rules.

After signing the Indo-Bangladesh agreement on the bus service in Dhaka on 17 June, joint secretary of the Bangladesh communication ministry, Karan Mahmudul Hasan, told newsmen in presence of his Indian counterpart K.R. Bhatti that henceforth about 3,000 India visas will be issued from Dhaka and Chittagong so that more Bangladeshis could visit India. Bhatti too was equally responsive. "It's a great pleasure for the people of India because they will get a chance to visit Bangladesh. It's just a beginning," he said.

In fact, the beginning was made when both India and Pakistan started the Delhi-Lahore bus link. It ushered in a new era of cooperation between neighbours. Such an arrangement made by Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif had a positive fallout in Bangladesh too.

At a time when the two countries, which went to war thrice in the past and are still locked in a war-like situation, could begin the bus service, why can't the Dhaka-Calcutta service operate peacefully, asked Dr Shamim Reza of Dhaka University. •

Rahman Jahangir/Dhaka



SUNIL GANGOPADHYAY

"Maybe they thought I'd be more popular than the PM. After all, this was going to be the PM's show"

PRADIP SANYAL

FOLLOW-UP

Missing the bus

The MEA drops author Sunil Gangopadhyay from the PM's delegation and then tries to make amends

When barbed wires do not stand in one's way, there could still be a glass ceiling. As the first two Calcutta-Dhaka goodwill buses pulled up at Benapole, on Bangladesh-India border, and people from both sides spontaneously embraced, surprising the VIPs on board with their enthusiasm, the air was rife with excitement and nostalgia. Jawans from the BSF fired in the air, giving the guests from India a guard of honour and schoolchildren paraded down the street, carrying placards which spoke of everlasting ties between the two countries. But even as songs were being sung and poems recited stirred bitter-sweet memories, the presence of one person was sorely missed. Author and poet Sunil Gangopadhyay who many in Bangladesh were

eagerly looking forward to seeing, hoping against hope that despite the trouble with getting a visa he would perhaps be persuaded to come, was not there.

There is a little political intrigue in the background, and it's difficult to pinpoint who is responsible for the goof-up. The West Bengal state government had suggested Gangopadhyay's name to be included in the Prime Minister's entourage, and sent their list to the ministry of external affairs (MEA). The Bangladesh High Commission claims the MEA never sent Gangopadhyay's name to them. Even as people cutting across party lines expressed outrage in the Assembly and chief minister Jyoti Basu wrote to the Prime Minister to see that the writer's name is included, Trinamul

Congress leader Mamata Banerjee questioned the 'arbitrary' system of sending names. "It would have been better if both the Centre and the state had joined panels," she said, quite cut up about the fact that her party was never consulted. The exclusion of people like MP and eminent skin-specialist Ranjit Panja ("The whole constituency in the border area is his") would not have happened then.

Economist and former vice-chancellor of Calcutta University, Santosh Bhattacharya has reservations about the inclusion of non-governmental people in the Prime Minister's entourage. "Because if they are, parties controlling the government will try to seek some political benefit out of it by choosing invitees. Why should artists

and literateurs tag themselves to government delegations?"

That the MEA had quickly reinducted Gangopadhyay's name on the eve of the bus's departure and he, like any self-respecting person would, had declined to go is now history. But the incident has raised a few uncomfortable questions. Did the MEA drop the writer because he is known to be close to the CPM? Were they worried about a recent drive launched by Gangopadhyay and like-minded intellectuals of Calcutta to revive Bengali language and culture in the state of West Bengal? Did they think his presence in Dhaka could stir up sentiments which could complicate the spirit of goodwill between the two countries? An official from the MEA is reported to have said that the writer was sympathetic towards terrorist activities in the north-east and that his writing smacked of separatist tendencies.

Although Bangladesh High Commission's official position is that Gangopadhyay's name was never sent to them for a visa, unofficial sources say that the Bangladesh government was not too keen on having Gangopadhyay in the delegation, for they disapprove of his writing. The writer had unequivocal support for exiled writer Taslima Nasreen, whose diatribe against rampant Islamic fundamentalism finally ended in her being driven out of the country. And now, his clarion call to gather more support for the cause of Bengali language and culture, cutting across geographical and political borders, may have been seen as detrimental to the interests of two sovereign nations. So, is there a threat, perceived or real?

"I don't want to be associated with any political party," says Gangopadhyay, referring to the Centre's possible indifference towards him on ideological grounds. "I believe in issue-based support against things like nuclear explosion, the demolition of the Babri Masjid." As for opposition from Bangladesh, he says, "Particular political parties, fundamentalists condemn me, but they do so here as well. But the ruling Awami League is quite friendly towards me and Sheikh Hasina has said she likes my poems." Could it be the move to revive Bengali ethos? "Maybe," he says, "some people may be scared. But reviving one's own culture does not mean rejecting or resisting others." And then, he adds mischievously, "Maybe people at the Centre thought I'd be more



MAMATA BANERJEE

"It would have been better if both the Centre and the state joined panels in drawing up the guest-list"



MAHASWETA DEVI

"Disrespect to one writer means disrespect to all. It's good to see solidarity between the writers of Bengali language today"

popular than the PM. After all, this was going to be the PM's show."

But what about more serious charges, like his fuelling separatist sentiments? "That's utter rubbish. I never said the two Bengals should be united. That's not possible."

But the Bengal intelligentsia is not fully convinced. A rumour doing the rounds is that Gangopadhyay's crusade for the cause of Bengali culture is a covert bid to launch his political career. And while the thinking people unhesitatingly condemn the denial of visa to Gangopadhyay, not many are willing to buy the theory that it has anything to do with his involvement in the move to revive Bengali pride. In fact, they are not ready to concede that it is a movement, at all. "It's just a wish on the part of the well-meaning intellectuals of Calcutta," says historian Gautam Bhadra. "And if that gives rise to any apprehension or expectation, I think that's over-reacting."

Santosh Bhattacharya adds, "I don't think the Centre, or anyone else, is trying to suppress the movement to develop a Bengali identity. If it was, why weren't other people in the delegation known to have sympathies for the cause of Bengali language and culture prevented? I don't think anybody feels threatened by cultural cooperation between Bengali-speaking people of two different states." A view which is shared by Mamata Banerjee.

Even author-activist Mahasweta Devi, who turned down the bus trip in a gesture of solidarity when she heard about the visa denial to Gangopadhyay ("Disrespect to one writer means disrespect to all,"), seems totally oblivious of the Bengali drive, busy as she is with the welfare of tribals and other people who turn to her for help. But, all the same, "It's good to see solidarity between writers of the Bengali language," which, she claims, wasn't so apparent a few years back.

Perhaps the move to revive Bengali pride is being perceived as too idealistic, romantic even. When compared with the achievements of Mahasweta Devi in rehabilitating the backward and unlettered tribal Shabar men and women (who now have jobs, knowledge and self-respect, largely due to her efforts); the applicability of the Bengali revival thesis still has miles of ground to cover. For one, the movement has not been able to gather mass support, being still quite urban, if not 'arm-chairish' in nature. Fellow intellectuals are sceptical, political people are suspicious and the general public are waiting for the moment when the Bengali drive will touch their everyday lives in a more realistic way.

"I'm waiting for the day when Sunil Gangopadhyay will take to the streets in addition to holding meetings and seminars," says Santosh Bhattacharya.

So are we. •

Chitralekha Basu/Calcutta

Back on track

Healthy relations between India and China have opened up again



A cool analysis of Jaswant Singh's important and timely visit to China vindicates the effusive despatches by the accompanying media team. At the very least, the easily avoidable damage done to India-China relations during the last 13 months has been undone. The relationship between the world's two most populous nations is back

on track. An opportunity to build it—brick by brick and hopefully at a greater speed—has, thus, opened up once again.

That is to the good of both sides. But to read anything more in the current India-China minuet would be an error. At any rate, the stupidity of investing the foreign minister's talks with the Chinese leaders with the kind of hype that is customary on such occasions must be avoided at all costs.

Nations, like mature individuals, do not cry over spilt milk. So let us put the bickering, initiated by George Fernandes before last year's nuclear tests and aggravated by the Prime Minister's unfortunate reference to the "Chinese threat" as a justification for them followed by Beijing's gross overreaction, behind us.

But let us not kid ourselves that China's reiteration of the need for India and Pakistan to abide by the UN Security Council Resolution 1172 (demanding that they sign not only the CTBT but also the NPT as non-nuclear powers) is a mere pro-forma statement. If any understanding is to be reached with China on a credible nuclear deterrent, a dialogue more intensive than the interrupted conversations with the United States will be necessary.

No less crucial are China's relations with Pakistan and their impact on India-Pakistan relations as well as Indian interests. Categorical Chinese denials of assistance to Pakistan's nuclear and missile programmes do not square up with the ground realities.

The best that can be expected is that this activity will become a thing of the past. But it will be unrealistic to believe that Beijing will in any way move away from Pakistan. Nearly 80 per cent of Pakistan's conventional weaponry today are of Chinese origin. Unless inflow of American weapons into Pakistan is resumed after the repeal of the Pressler Amendment, the scenario is unlikely to change.

To this no great objection can be taken. Especially when the disarming Chinese reply is that India is welcome to buy from Beijing all the weapons it wants. What is vital, however, is that China should be persuaded not to use its good relations with Pakistan as a "pressure point" on India. This is an achievable objective.

And that is where Kargil comes in. Jaswant's visit was fixed long before the Pakistani violation of the LoC erupted. Pakistani foreign minister Sartaj Aziz dashed to the Chinese capital before arriving in Delhi for a dismal diplomatic exercise whose failure could have been foretold. From China Aziz got no comfort.

China refrains from embarrassing Pakistan publicly. But it

insists on maintaining "neutrality" between India and Pakistan while stating clearly that the LoC must be respected by both sides. It also wants all issues, Kargil and Kashmir included, settled through peaceful and bilateral talks between Delhi and Islamabad.

Given their own anxieties about the Muslim majority autonomous region of Xingjiang, the Chinese cannot be enthusiastic about the spread of Islamic fundamentalism, especially within the Pakistani Army, operating not far from the Chinese border.

It is nice to know from Jaswant Singh that the delineation of

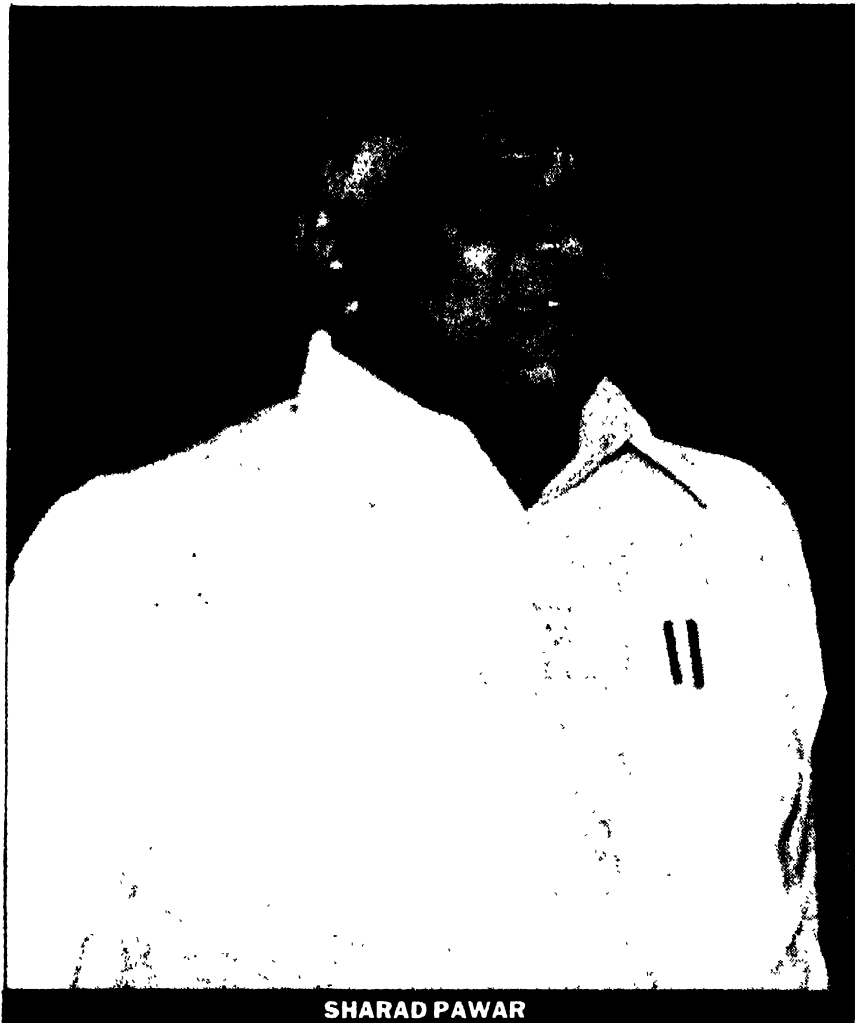


It is gratifying that Chinese PM Zhu Rongji plans to visit India, probably after the elections. Zhu is also China's economic czar and spoke to Jaswant about expanding economic ties between the two Asian giants

the Line of Actual Control between India and China is to be expedited. It is time, too, one might say. In most places the LAC is clear enough. There are seven or eight grey areas where it is contested and where at present both sides patrol.

The pace of future progress can only be set by leaders at the top, not by officials. It is gratifying, therefore, that Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji plans to visit this country, probably after the elections. Zhu is not only the Premier but also China's economic czar. He spoke to Jaswant about the need to expand the woefully limited economic ties between the two Asian giants. This call must be heeded without delay. •

Regional leaders form yet another anti-Congress, anti-BJP front. And each one wants to become Prime Minister



SHARAD PAWAR

FRONT FACADE

The party may be called the Indian Nationalist Congress; its president may attend the all party meetings on Kargil and even give soundbites to the national media, expressing his concern; and the NCP can form a front with Mulayam Singh Yadav — but no one is fooled. The NCP may have a national outlook but, at the end of the day, it is fighting a very localised ballot: the battle for Maharashtra.

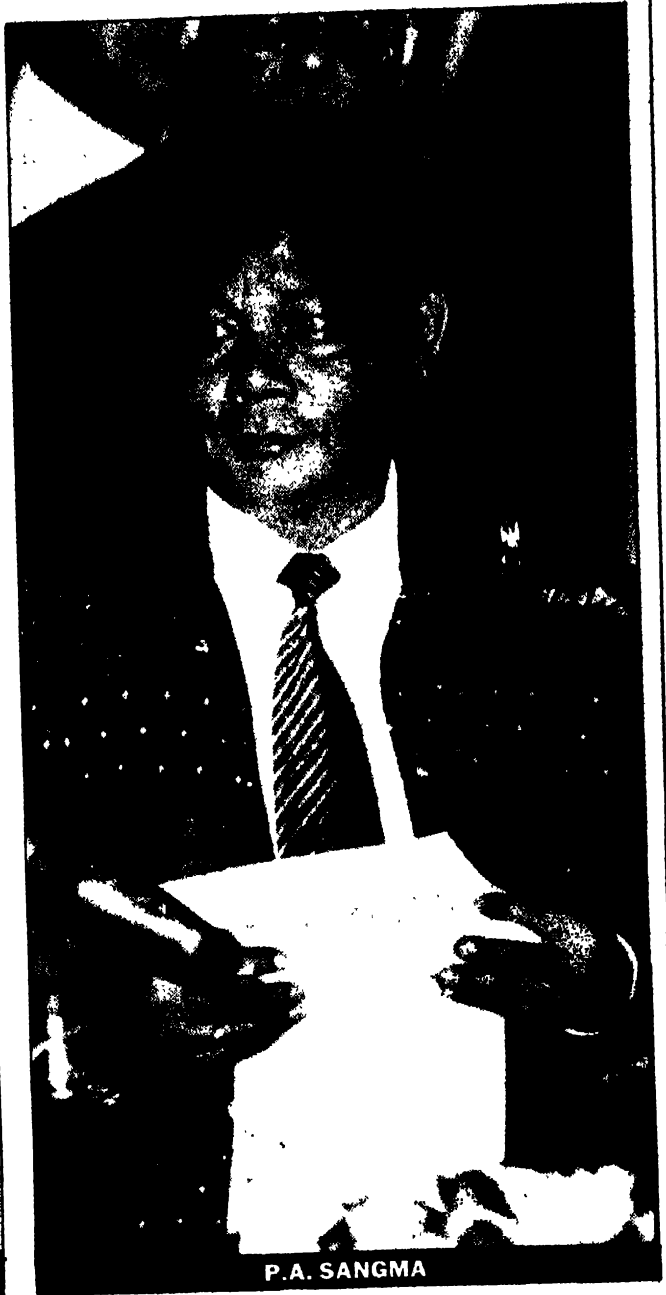
For it is only when Sharad Pawar can get as many as 25 to 30 seats can he hope to bargain for ministerial berths at the Centre. And the only state where he can get the bulk of these numbers is Maharashtra. As for the other two founder members — P.A. Sangma says he can deliver as many as four to five seats from the north-east, but very few believe that he can deliver more than his own; similarly, Tariq Anwar is hopeful of getting two to three seats from Bihar, specially if the tie-up with the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) comes through, then one of these could be a reserved seat from south Bihar. But the Congress says that without Laloo Yadav's help, Anwar may not even win his own constituency from Katihar in Bihar. Anwar, however, insists that his vote bank is still intact (Katihar is predominantly a Muslim constituency).

However, two seats from Bihar and another two to three from the north-east does little to push the total to the desired 30. Pawar knows that he has to deliver the bulk from his home state. Which is one reason why he decided to form a new front with Mulayam Singh Yadav's Samajwadi Party.

An electoral arrangement suits both — but the benefit does not extend beyond Maharashtra as Pawar has no presence in Uttar Pradesh. However, an association with 'Maulana Mulayam' will do much for his secular credentials amongst the Muslim vote bank in Maharashtra. Of late, the Congress has been pointing fingers at Pawar's role in the 1993 communal riots in Bombay. And when the former chief minister Sudhakhar Naik — an avid Pawar-baiter and an accused in the Sri Krishna Commission probing into the riots — joined up with his enemy, the accusations became more



MULAYAM SINGH YADAV



P.A. SANGMA

If Pawar and Co. manage to get more than 30 seats, then they can bargain for the top job itself. But in a party where there are more prime ministerial candidates than party workers, who gets to be PM? If Pawar wanted to be a Cabinet minister, then he could have stayed on in Sonia's Congress. If Sangma wanted his old job as Speaker back, he could have simply stayed on. And Mulayam has made no secret about his prime ministerial ambitions



CHANDRABABU NAIDU: his joining the front will give it a boost and increase its bargaining power during the post-election scenario

strident.

So, Pawar needed Yadav to clean up his secular image. In fact, during the press conference in Delhi when the two announced their tie-up, Pawar was questioned about his role in the riots. Sitting next to him on the dais, Mulayam whispered (into Pawar's ear and unfortunately also into the mike in front of him): "Aap nahin bolive (You don't say anything)." Pawar kept shut and let Mulayam field all the questions on the Babri Masjid and the riots that followed.

The front had got its act together.

But what does Mulayam get out of this arrangement? In Uttar Pradesh, Pawar is of no help to him. At the same time, he does not lose anything. In fact, he can only gain — for without Pawar, Mulayam knows that he cannot win a single seat in Maharashtra. (During the 1998 polls, the Samajwadi Party got zero seats, but 2.6 per cent of the votes.) So, any seat that Pawar can win for the party will only add to Mulayam's numbers.

Neither side has any illusions about the longevity of the alliance. In private, both parties admit that the gameplan is to garner as many seats as possible. And for this noble end, they are inviting other like-minded parties to follow suit. Such as the CPI. Its general-secretary A.B. Bardhan is an old friend of Pawar's; and more importantly, the party cadres have indicated that they are

Temporary TRUCE

Why did Sonia Gandhi meet P.V. Narasimha Rao?

The day she took over as Congress president, Sonia Gandhi called on Sitaram Kesri and reassured him of his place within the party. And though it is debatable whether he has much of a say in party matters these days, he is shown all the outward signs of courtesy. For instance, Sonia always makes sure that he is on the dais at all important party functions. And during her resignation drama, when Kesri was attacked by angry Congress workers, she rang him up to ask about his health.

This is not the case with the other former party president. Narasimha Rao has sunk without a trace, more so after he was denied a Lok Sabha ticket last year. And when he went abroad for medical treatment, no one noticed his absence.

But last month, Sonia Gandhi went and called on Rao at his residence. The ostensible reason was to enquire about his health, but since it has been over a



fortnight since he has returned from the USA, this was a somewhat belated courtesy call. However, the timing coincided perfectly with Sharad Pawar's formation of a new party. Most Congressmen admit that Sonia wanted to ensure that Rao did not follow suit. And take others such as J.B. Patnaik with him.

Quick to follow their leader, the party magazine *Sandesh* (which had hitherto ignored Rao) brought out an article on the former Prime Minister's achievements.

But this can be a temporary truce at best. Sonia must have heard the rumour that Rao was one of the authors of the infamous Pawar-Sangma-Tariq letter. And even if she hasn't there is no way that she would forget the way Rao treated her when he became party president.

For his part, Rao is not going to forgive the Sonia coterie for plotting against him, even while he was Prime Minister and in-charge of the party. And he is not quite sure if the courtesy call would extend to a Lok Sabha ticket.

For the time being, however, it suits both to smile and sip tea together. •

Priya Sahgal/New Delhi



not opposed to an electoral understanding with the NCP and Mulayam Singh Yadav's party. The other Left parties such as the Forward Bloc and the Republican People's Party have made similar noises.

The CPM, however, still has to make up its mind officially. However, at a press conference last week, Harkishen Singh Surjeet attacked the new front saying that it only weakened the democratic and secular parties fighting against the communal forces.

And as for the other partner of Mulayam's erstwhile front, the Rashtriya Loktantrik Morcha, he is currently being wooed in the form of informal family dinners at 10 Janpath. In return, Laloo Yadav has assured the Congress of his help in Bihar. Mulayam, however, says that he is hopeful of bringing the other Yadav over to his side, but not many buy that line.

Which leaves the Telugu Desam Party (TDP). However, Chandrababu Naidu is still playing his favourite card and saying nothing. Neither Pawar nor Mulayam has a presence in Andhra and Babu's computer-savvy reputation counts for little in either Uttar Pradesh or Maharashtra. But if he does join the front, then it will just increase the numbers, and its bargaining power, during the post-election scenario.

And that is precisely what this front is all about. If they do manage to get more

LALOO PRASAD YADAV: although he has assured the Congress of his help in Bihar, Mulayam is hopeful of bringing Laloo over to his side



A.B. BARDHAN: his party, the CPI, may not be opposed to an electoral understanding with the NCP and Mulayam Singh Yadav's party

than 30 seats, then Pawar and Co. are hopeful of not just getting plum ministerial berths at the Centre, but also of grabbing the top job itself. As a working committee member of the NCP points out, if the Congress gets even five seats less than the current 140, then most of the newly-elected Congressmen will leave Sonia Gandhi and team up with Pawar. That could put him in a position to stake claim.

In which case, who gets to be Prime Minister? In a party where there are more prime ministerial candidates than mere party workers, that is a very important question. If all Sharad Pawar wanted was to be a Cabinet minister, then he could have stayed on in Sonia's Congress. And if all Sangma wanted was his old job as Speaker back, or a ministerial berth, he could have got either of these two if he'd simply stayed on.

And, of course, there is Mulayam Singh Yadav who has made no secret about his prime ministerial ambitions. In fact, one of the reasons why he was so miffed with Sonia was when she told the President of India during the crisis last April that she was only interested in forming a Congress-led government.

Hence in the case of the Mulayam-Pawar-Sangma front, the real test of unity is not during the elections. But in the period after the polls — when it's time to divide the spoils. •

Priya Sahgal/New Delhi



Pawar crisis

The political situation in the state is fluid, but the Maratha strongman has both the Congress and the Sena-BJP alliance worried

Date: 10 June, 1999

Venue: Shivaji Park in Bombay, the political battleground

Occasion: The first public rally organised by Sharad Pawar's newly-formed Nationalist Congress Party (NCP)

Truckloads of supporters from all over Maharashtra, as well as from outside the state, poured in at Shivaji Park as Sharad Pawar's colleagues P.A. Sangma and Tariq Anwar gaped in disbelief. In an amazing show of solidarity, an estimated three lakh audience clapped and cheered the Maratha leader's rhetoric on Marathi *asmita* and sniggered at the Congress's 'dynastic' politics.

Pawar's clarion call seems to have rattled both the state Congress as well as the ruling Shiv Sena-BJP coalition. The Congress, predictably, maintains that it is better off without the Maratha strongman. Says Prataprao Bhosale, Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee chief and Pawar's *bete noire*: "Pawar's loss will hardly affect the party's fortunes in the elections; he was never a vote-catcher. With his ouster, the Congress has become a cleaner party now."

"Pawar was quick to take credit in 1998 when Maharashtra returned 33 MPs to the Lok Sabha but what about his failure to ensure wins in other elections?" questions a senior Congress leader. In the 1985 Assembly polls, with Rajiv Gandhi at the helm of the Congress leadership, Pawar's independent outfit Progressive Democratic Front managed to win only 54 seats compared to Congress's 162 in the state legislature, he informs. In the 1990 Assembly elections, the Congress's strength

Sharad Pawar. P.A. Sangma, Tariq Anwar with other NCP leaders at the Shivaji Park rally on 10 June

came down from 162 to 141. In 1995, with Pawar as chief minister, came the Congress downfall when it won just 80 seats in the state legislature and lost the state to the Shiv Sena-BJP alliance. Furthermore, Maharashtra returned just 15 MPs to the Lok Sabha in 1996. Political analysts, however, feel that the ground reality is quite different. To say that the Maratha leader's exit has created a vacuum would be stating the obvious. In fact, the Congress has dug its own grave.

Pawar won the first round in this battle for supremacy with the Congress when 45 of the 77 Congress legislators pledged their loyalty to the NCP in writing before the Speaker of legislative Assembly. Majority of the Congress corporators too have joined hands with the NCP. Further, the powerful sultans of cash-rich sugar cooperative factories in western Maharashtra have lent their support to Pawar. Vishnuanna Patil, who tops the list of sugar barons, joined the NCP along with his son Madan Patil, a former Congress MP. Former ministers Vijaysinh Mohite-Patil and Shankarrao Kolhe, too, have switched their loyalties to NCP. This strengthens Pawar's hold on the western Maharashtra region which is traditionally Congress domain. The Maratha leader enjoys tremendous support in the Marathwada region. The Congress can only boast of some standing in one of the country's poorest regions, Vidharbha, while the Konkan plateau is divided between the Shiv Sena and Pawar's supporters.

"Pawar has built himself a solid base in the state during his exile from the Congress between 1978 and 1985. He is the only Congress leader who toured the entire state and knows it intimately," informs a political observer. His political calculations are accurate too, he further adds. Once Pawar had warned a Congress candidate that he was trailing behind his opponent with 1.5 per cent votes even before the first vote was cast. And sure enough, the candidate lost with a margin of 1.5 per cent votes. Moreover, the Maratha leader has huge spending power which the state Congress leaders lack. "Pawar has enormous

"We will win the Assembly polls and send 35 MPs to the Lok Sabha"

Says Chhagan Bhujbal, Maharashtra chief of the NCP

Chhagan Bhujbal has been selected as the first Maharashtra chief of Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), though this news is yet to be made official. In a chat with Srinivas, this conservative leader speaks about the NCP's future plans and predicts a clean-cut win for their party in the Assembly polls.

Q: The Shiv Sena-BJP alliance is currently talking of holding simultaneous parliamentary as well as Assembly elections in September. Now even the Congress has supported this move. What is your party's stand?



A: We are not scared of simultaneous polls. If we could muster as much support within 10 days of our party's formation, that time would be more than enough for us to win the elections. We will win the Assembly polls and send 35 MPs to the Lok Sabha.

Q: What issues will your party focus on in the coming polls?

A: With the Sena-BJP government in power, there are no dearth of issues. The state is completely bankrupt. Indiscipline prevails in all departments of administration — right from the police to the bureaucracy. The unemployment graph has risen to 42 lakh from 27 lakh jobless youths in 1995.

Q: In his recent interview to Saman, Raj Thackeray lashed out against Sharad Pawar for stealing Sena's votes via the Maratha samaj issue as well as Hov Bhat's age-old line against Maharashtra...

A: All the political parties have trained their guns on us as they are well aware that the electoral scales are tilted in our favour. It seems as if they have no independent agenda except talking about us.

Q: There have been strong rumours about NCP forging an electoral alliance with the BJP for both the Assembly as well as the parliamentary polls...

A: Our party manifesto as well as our stand at the Shivaji Park rally has made it crystal clear that we will keep an equidistance from both the BJP as well as the Shiv Sena. However, with minority party leaders joining forces with us, this is clearly out of the question.

Interviewed by Nandini Wadia, Bombay

The numbers game

Sharad Pawar's impact in Maharashtra

Claims and counter-claims are a way of political life and it comes as no surprise that both the parent Congress and the breakaway Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) are indulging in a war of words over their likely performance in the polls. The game of electoral one-upmanship is understandable in Maharashtra as the 48 Lok Sabha seats in the state holds more than a key.

In 1998, the seat tally was: Congress 33; Shiv Sena 6; BJP 4; Republican Party of India (RPI) 4; and Peasants & Workers Party (PWP) 1. The Congress was in alliance with the RPI and the Samajwadi Party that did not win a single seat. The BJP and the Sena continued with its alliance and had to bite the dust as compared to its performance in 1992 when the two parties bagged 33 seats. The PWP won one seat, defeating A.R. Antulay — for the first time in more than a decade.

The BJP-Sena apple cart was not upset due to a decline in its vote-bank. The two parties polled an additional 3.51 per cent vote as compared to the 1996 election. Then how did this amazing slide occur?

For starters, the Congress-led front ensured that there was no division in the anti-BJP/Sena vote in any of the constituencies. Moreover, the bipolar polarisation in the state also ensured that independent candidates and those from smaller state and national parties (like JD, CPI and CPM) polled very few votes. In fact, the number of seats contested by independent candidates went down from a whopping 806 — the highest in more than a decade — to only 172 and this had a corresponding effect on the votes polled by them.

In the coming polls, division of the anti-BJP/Sena vote is certain. Not only will the NCP cut into the Congress vote-bank, but also the split in the RPI and the SP will virtually render the combined vote share of the three parties by almost half.

Though there is every likelihood of the BJP-Sena grouping failing to hold on to its vote share of 1998, past electoral behaviour discounts such a possibility as the pressure to hold on to its vote-bank is on the Congress and its allies. Unless there are dramatic political changes in the state between now and the polls, the BJP would have reason to look towards Pawar with gratitude. Because, even though he himself might not be able to win many seats for his party, he would have caused sufficient damage to the Congress to wreck its prospects. •

Niranjan Mukhopadhyay/New Delhi



Though Sharad Pawar himself might not be able to win too many seats for the Nationalist Congress Party in Maharashtra, he can cause sufficient damage to the Congress to wreck its prospects

stature...there are no leaders in Maharashtra with his political acumen or vision," he says.

In his article in *The Asian Age*, former bureaucrat B G Deshmukh said: "The party may say that Sharad Pawar may not do well during the general elections or even during the state elections this year but they must accept that Pawar can rout the Congress and occupy the space vacated so that his Congress becomes the real Congress in Maharashtra." He further noted: "The general secretary of the Congress in-charge in Maharashtra, Madhavrao Scindia, is a non-resident Maharashtra and has apparently no inkling how a Maharashtra mind

works or about Maharashtra pride. Otherwise, he wouldn't show such bankruptcy of political strategy in welcoming Suresh Kalmadi back into the Congress. The other so-called leaders of the party in the state like Murli Deora, A.R. Antulay, Prataprao Bhosale, Nasikrao Tirpude and others are persons of straw and cannot even get elected on their own from their own constituencies."

Even Maharashtra chief minister Narayan Rane admitted that the real tussle of power in the Assembly as well as in the Lok Sabha polls will be between Pawar's NCP and the Sena-BJP alliance. The Hindutva coalition, which

earlier spoke about winning the elections with a split in the Congress, changed its tune after the NCP's rally.

In fact, a day after the rally, deputy chief minister Gopinath Munde admitted at a press conference that the alliance partners would press for simultaneous Assembly and parliamentary polls in September as that would improve their poll prospects. This is in stark contrast with its earlier stand that the polls be held separately.

Immediately after the fall of the Atal Behari Vajpayee government at the Centre, the Sena had pointed out in a separate memorandum to the Election Commission that the five-year tenure of the

Maharashtra Assembly was scheduled to expire in March 2000. So conducting Assembly polls in September would do "gross injustice" to the state government. Last month, senior Sena leader Subhash Desai and MP Madhukar Sarpotdar called on chief election commissioner M.S. Gill to reiterate their views on the issue.

A Sena leader spelt out the shift in the alliance's views on simultaneous elections. Their logic: with the twin polls slated for September, both the Congress as well as the NCP will not get the breathing space to campaign aggressively. "They will exhaust their energies in fielding candidates for 288 Assembly seats and 48 Lok Sabha seats in Maharashtra." Moreover, the Sena also fears that Pawar would break the Sena and lure away its young leaders. Informs the Sena leader: "Pawar has laid all his stakes in the elections — he is well aware that there is no political future for him if he loses. If he does not get 80 per cent of the state Congress leaders into his fold within the next two months, then he will break the Sena with Bhujbal's help. However, with the September polls, the damage they can cause will be minimum."

That the Hindutva combine has hit the panic button is clear from Bal Thackeray's three-part interview in the Sena mouthpiece *Saamna* in which he lashed out against Pawar: "*Jo vicharo ki chori karta hai woh sabse bada chor hai* (one who steals ideas is the biggest thief)." The Sena chief was referring to Pawar's speech at the Shivaji Park rally which dealt with Marathi *asmita* and New Delhi's age-old bias against Maharashtra. Says Aroon Tikekar, editor of Marathi daily *Loksatta*: "Their greatest anxiety is that Pawar has robbed a vital part of their socio-political agenda."

In the 1998 parliamentary polls, with strategic alliances with Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Republican Party of India, Pawar had managed to win 37 seats — the highest number for Congress and its allies in any state. This time, too, he has forged an electoral alliance with the SP but whether this tie-up will pay off or not remains to be seen. In the 1998 polls, SP had not won a single Lok Sabha seat. At the moment, Muslim votes are split between the Congress and the NCP and political observers say it is too early to comment which way their mood will swing. However, Abu Asim Azmi, SP state president, claims that 75



"Pawar has built himself a solid base in the state during his exile from the Congress between 1978 and 1985. He is the only Congress leader who toured the entire state and knows it intimately," points out a political observer

Muslim leaders have agreed to support the NCP. "Our first aim is to defeat the Sena-BJP alliance and then the Congress. There is a feeling among Muslims that though former chief minister Sudhakar Naik and Sharad Pawar did not do much to stem the riots, they are the lesser evil than the Congress."

The RPI, which had contributed 4 seats to the Congress tally of 37 in the 1998 Lok Sabha elections, seems headed for a split. At a two-day national executive meeting in New Delhi recently, a group of party leaders led by veteran R.S. Gavai were in favour of supporting Sonia's Congress, while party president Ramdas Athavale and general secretary Jogendra Kawade are keen on a tie-up with Pawar's NCP. Athavale, a powerful Dalit leader is extremely close to the Maratha strongman. No one is quite sure at the moment which party Prakash Ambedkar, grandson of B.R. Ambedkar seems headed towards. Ambedkar, on his part, is holding his cards close to his chest.

A political observer says that even though NCP's first public rally was well-attended, the crowds did not get any clear message. "Pawar would have done well if he gave a slogan, however hollow. Like, say, Indira Gandhi's *Garibi Hatao* slogan. Now, he might have to use Sonia's foreigner card for the villagers and focus on the issue of competent government for the urban masses."

Political analysts also inform that the political situation in Maharashtra is too fluid at present to predict the final outcome. But they agree that if Pawar can rope in a few influential Congress leaders like Gurudas Kamat, who defeated information and broadcasting minister Pramod Mahajan, or Vilasrao Deshmukh into his party, besides forging an alliance with the Janata Dal, the Peasants and Workers Party and also former Sena rebels like Ganesh Naik, Suresh Navale and Gulabrao Gawande, he is likely to make a forceful impact at the polls. •

Kanjal Walla/Bombay

*Lucknow voters
disapprove of
Mulayam Singh
Yadav's strategy*

Either Me Or Nobody

It's one of the fascinating aspects of Mulayam Singh Yadav's style of politics. The Samajwadi Party chief's track record shows that he has rarely contested two elections or formed a government with the same ally. He did stick with his old socialist cronies, but that was only until he was a political nobody. Once he became a leader of consequence, the UP strongman has been ruthless in changing partners and striking slick, little deals to thwart a common enemy.

That same remarkable trait was once more in evidence very recently when he chose as his ally Maratha strongman Sharad Pawar to oppose Sonia Gandhi and her Congress in the coming elections.

It's an irony really, but let us go back ten years in time. The year was 1989. Mulayam had come to power in the country's most important and volatile state — Uttar Pradesh. Supporting him also was the Bharatiya Janata Party which was part of a much-hyped anti-Congress coalition. Unfortunately, Mulayam's friendship with the BJP didn't last long enough. In October-November 1990, violent *kar sevaks* tried to storm the Babri Masjid and faced the wrath of the administration as a tense chief minister gave orders to start firing.

Result: an angry BJP parted ways with the coalition. Faced with the imminent collapse of his government, Mulayam turned to the Congress, convincing the leadership to extend outside support to his newly-formed Samajwadi Janata Party (SJP). It was a good move. The then Congress chief, Rajiv Gandhi, was led to believe that extending support to Mulayam would help the Congress to win back its Muslim vote-bank.

Seasoned Congressmen like N.D. Tiwari, himself a former chief minister, saw the folly of supporting a man like Mulayam but his advice was ignored. The blunder was realised only later, as all blunders are, but when Congress bosses in Delhi gave Tiwari the green signal to withdraw support, Mulayam, adept at his own brand of crafty politics, was already a step ahead. The sun wasn't up



Far from helping him in any way, Mulayam Singh's tie-up with Sharad Pawar (right) can only make matters worse for him in UP

yet when Mulayam, pre-empting Tiwari's move, went to the then Governor, Satyanarayan Reddy, and recommended dissolution of the Assembly, taking the Congress by surprise.

After the Babri Masjid was demolished, Mulayam once again went on the prowl for a new ally. By this time he had already formed the Samajwadi Par-

ty. Now he struck a deal with the Bahujan Samaj Party. The new combine — the SP-BSP axis of OBC-Dalits — clicked and after the 1994 elections Mulayam was back at the helm.

He should have been a satisfied and happy man. But then people with insatiable appetites are seldom, if ever, happy. The new alliance was rated as the "most natural alliance", but it wasn't destined

to last. Mulayam, now chief minister for a second term, was already working on his next move: to lure away Kanshi Ram and Mayawati loyalists and engineer a split in the BSP.

It didn't work out the way he thought it would. Mayawati, wise to the ways of this scheming manoeuvrer, moved early and, before Mulayam could make anything happen, declared the BSP's withdrawal of support. What followed was virtual war, and one of the most sordid episodes in India's recent political history. At Lucknow's state guest house where they had assembled for a meeting, Mayawati and her supporters were literally ambushed by rampaging SP goons. "A well-wisher's message on my pager not to open my door under any circumstance saved my life," recalls Mayawati. "Later, I also discovered that Mulayam was all set to have me eliminated, in case I had committed the blunder of coming out of my room."

She didn't, choosing wisely to stay put inside the safety of her room. "That would have been the end of our party as the shock of my murder would have completely shaken Manyawar Kanshi



Amar Singh is the man behind most of Mulayam's key decisions

Ramji, leaving Mulayam free to grab the BSP's massive support base," says Mayawati.

By the next election, Mulayam had come close to the other Yadav: RJD chief Laloo Prasad. He had, by then, judged Laloo's vote-catching potential which had adversely affected the SP's poll prospects in Western UP in the previous election.



Laloo Yadav tried his best to convince Mulayam to support the Congress

Meanwhile, Mulayam's stint as defence minister further stoked his ambitions. As hasty as he has always been, he was now looking for the top job when I.K. Gujral emerged as the consensus man. This was frustrating and it began to show when at nearly all party meetings and press conferences, Mulayam began telling all and sundry how he had turned down the top job. "I had almost become Prime Minister; the offer was there. Only the swearing-in was left. But you see, I am not one of those who run after power," he would say over and over again.

His defence ministership ended with the fall of the United Front government. The next step was the Rashtriya Loktantrik Morcha. The wily Mulayam went a step further. He clinched the deal with an engagement: between his environmental engineer son and Laloo's charming medico daughter.

In such a scenario, Laloo Yadav's decision to go with the Congress in the coming polls must have hurt. Sources reveal that the Bihar strongman had tried his best to convince Mulayam to join hands with the Congress. But greed probably got the better of him as the ambitious SP chief refused to settle for anything less than deputy prime ministership. It was an open secret that initially he had been lobbying for the prime ministership. It was only when he realised that it was too tall a demand for others who had agreed to provide a national alternative to the Vajpayee government, that Mulayam toned it down.

Obviously it still was a bit too tall. Mulayam's one-time ally, CPI(M)'s Harkishen Singh Surjeet, also tried to make him realise that he was asking for far too much and that the immediate priority should be to get rid of the BJP government. But in vain. Says a senior SP leader: "Even most of us were of the same view, but *netaji's* new-found friend, philosopher and guide Amar Singh had cast such a spell over him, that he would not listen to any sane advice."

It's perhaps the most succinct sum-up of a maverick at play. Amar Singh, the liaison man-turned-industrialist-turned-politician from Calcutta, now is the man behind most of Mulayam's key decisions. Much to the irritation of the SP chief's old associates, Amar Singh now calls the shots in the party. Complains a party old-timer: "Tell me, what political matu-

rity can you expect from a man whose connection with politicians had been solely limited to striking business deals between industrial houses and important politicians?"

Another young MLA is also of the same opinion. "Our party is in for trouble this time. And it will be all thanks to Amar Singh and his magic spell over our *netaji*," he says and asks, "I wonder why a seasoned leader like Mulayam Singh Yadav cannot see through the political shallowness of the man."

The complains run on like a litany of woes. "*Netaji* has annoyed senior party leaders like Beni Prasad Verma, Ram Shankar Kaushik, Janeshwar Misra and many others simply because of Amar Singh," says a legislator. According to him, "Even Mohd Azam Khan had been sidelined for quite sometime; and only after realisation dawned that the SP's one-time exclusive Muslim vote was gradually slipping out, that he began to give due importance to Azam once again."

Most SP veterans feel that the party would have been much better off with a tie-up with the Congress. "What does Sharad Pawar mean to Uttar Pradesh," asks a legislator from Western UP. "Can he help Mulayam in getting a single seat in this state."

However, Mulayam-loyalist and state party chief Ram Saran Das is pretty confident. "We are a national par-

Mayawati: "I discovered that Mulayam was all set to have me eliminated"



ty and when it comes to the Lok Sabha polls, we'll prove how significant a role we will play." Das exudes optimism: "Mulayam Singh Yadav's association with Sharad Pawar will help both to get the chunk of Muslim votes in Maha-

Harkishan Singh Surjeet tried to make Mulayam realise that the immediate priority should be to get rid of the BJP

ashtra as also in other southern states where our party will contest. After all," he says, "Muslims know that Mulayam alone is the true secular leader of this country who sacrificed his chair for their sake."

What Das refuses to accept is the growing feeling that Muslims are deserting Mulayam. "How can Muslims forget that it was Mulayam Singh Yadav who saved their Babri Masjid from demolition in 1990. He ordered firing on violent mobs even though he had to give up his chief minister's chair," he says. "Mind you, the saffron brigade is quiet only because of Mulayam Singh Yadav. You take away the Samajwadi Party and see what the half-pant wallahs (referring to the RSS) do to Muslims."

It's not so easy as it seems. Several Muslims, who until not very long ago swore by Mulayam, see no logic in the SP leader's claim. What seems to have put them off is the SP chief's volte face on the question of providing a national alternative to the Vajpayee government.

"All along he had been declaring that



Salman Khurshid regards Mulayam's reactions as a manifestation of his nervousness

he would stand solidly behind the Congress if Sonia Gandhi took the lead in pulling down the BJP-led coalition at the Centre," says Fasih Ahmed, a former Army colonel. "But when it came to real business, he quietly chickened out. What Mulayam did was too glaring to be ignored. After all, what could be worse than the 'either-me-or-nobody' approach adopted by him."

Journalist Hisam Siddiqui who edits his own Urdu weekly *Iqdid Markaz* feels that it is high time Mulayam realised how badly he stands exposed after refusing to support a Sonia Gandhi-led government as an alternative to the Vajpayee regime." Siddiqui says that today it is Mayawati who stands a better chance of winning over Muslims than Mulayam. His argument is that it was Mayawati who was responsible for bringing down the BJP government on the floor of the House. Mulayam, on the other hand, was essentially responsible for providing Vajpayee with another lease of life.

A senior Muslim bureaucrat sums it up. "As if to add insult to injury, he [Mulayam] has joined hands with Sharad Pawar whose role in the Bombay riots, which left heavy Muslim casual-

ties, cannot be overlooked."

The kind of personalised poster-war that was unleashed by Mulayam on the Congress and UPCC chief Salman Khurshid in particular also reflected his jitteriness over the impending erosion of his Muslim vote-bank. If anything, the exercise has proved counter-productive. "Does Mulayam consider Muslims so gullible as to believe the poster showing Salman Khurshid, Atal Behari Vajpayee and Narasimha Rao sitting together and watching the demolition of the Babri Masjid on television?" is the question on many Muslim lips.

For many, the second poster which shows Khurshid and Vajpayee embracing, with a long list of personal accusations against the UPCC chief, is again a reflection of Mulayam's low, short-sighted approach. For instance, the poster labels Khurshid as one who has married a Jew (though his wife is a Christian), it charges him of getting his sisters married to non-Muslims and accuses him of striking a deal with the BJP in order to let his father Khurshid

Alam Khan continue as Karnataka Governor.

Khurshid, on his part, regards Mulayam's reactions as "manifestation of his nervousness". He follows it up with a little satirical punch: this nervousness is "natural" says Khurshid, because the man is "politically wise enough to foresee his crumbling vote base".

Even Mulayam's own partymen admit in private that the SP will find it difficult to retain its tally of 20 seats in the Parliament. His joining hands with Pawar, they say, has closed all doors for him.

Clearly, far from helping him in any way, Mulayam's tie-up with Sharad Pawar can only make matters worse for him in UP. Maybe it will. Maybe not, if the Gods smile down upon him. But Mulayam does have a tough time ahead. Arrogant, aggressive and power-hungry, the scheming, cunning politico knows that his last step was a gamble. Where would he go from here? That's a difficult question. Ranjana Bajpai, the youthful UP Mahila Congress chief, quips: "Who knows, if now after having ditched everyone, Mulayam would eventually end up in the BJP's lap—perhaps his last resort." It's worth a thought. •

Sharat Pradhan/Lucknow

The wrong man for the job

Party president Kushabhau Thakre may be an organisational genius but has proved ruinous for the BJP

If ever there was a man behind his time, it is Kushabhau Thakre. Bharatiya Janata Party workers can only find it within themselves to feel sorry for him. Their president is an old-style RSS/BJP worker who has spent his whole life shunning the spotlight. He is a simple-minded individual unused to aggressive questioning from reporters and the glare of television cameras (his only acquaintance with handling televisions is that he knows how to turn one on — he is addicted to *Chitrahaar* and frequently invites younger party workers to watch the song-and-dance sequence along with him). Thakre is saddled with a job he is unsuited for, at a time he is unsuited for.

Therefore, it is no surprise to resigned party workers that Thakre keeps issuing statements and tripping up on them. It is all a bit embarrassing, but it's nothing new. When he took over the party and the BJP was defeated in the Madhya Pradesh Assembly elections, he pronounced his judgement on why that happened: because the central government was not running properly. After Atal Behari Vajpayee and Lal Krishna Advani remonstrated with him, he said he was misquoted.

Then there was the insurance Bill. He aired strong views on the dangers of letting foreign companies enter the insurance sector. Thakre said proudly that his line was the same as that of the Swadeshi Jagaran Manch and the RSS. Unfortunately this was not the line followed by the Government of India. So Thakre's statement immediately set off speculation in the country about whether the party was at war with the

government. Once again, Thakre was persuaded to take back his statement.

Again, it was the press which was on the firing line for the BJP president's remarks in Guwahati, that Bangladesh was committing demographic aggression on India. No one would have seriously contested this, except for the fact that this charge was made as the Calcutta-Dhaka bus rolled into Dhaka with the Prime Minister of India aboard! Thakre had no choice but to say that he had been misquoted — yet again.

And the latest Thakre escapade was to announce that in view of the situation in Kargil, as India was on the brink of a war, it might be a good idea to postpone the general elections. He even went so far as to suggest alternative dates.

Vajpayee shot the idea down before it had the chance of getting any further: but from the glint in the Opposition's eye, it was clear that it was seeing visions of the imposition of an internal emergency, suspension of democratic rights, press censorship... by a BJP government.

Thakre is saddled with a job he is unsuited for, at a time he is unsuited for.

Therefore, it is no surprise to resigned party workers that Thakre keeps issuing statements and tripping up on them

Why does Thakre do this? Why does he keep putting his foot in his mouth publicly?

In the party, Thakre is known as a hardliner. He has been an RSS *pracharak* for most of his life. He wanted to become a doctor, but chucked that up for a full-time career in patriotism. In 1952, the RSS loaned Thakre to the Jana Sangh. He started his political career by becoming a joint general secretary of the Jana Sangh in Madhya Pradesh.

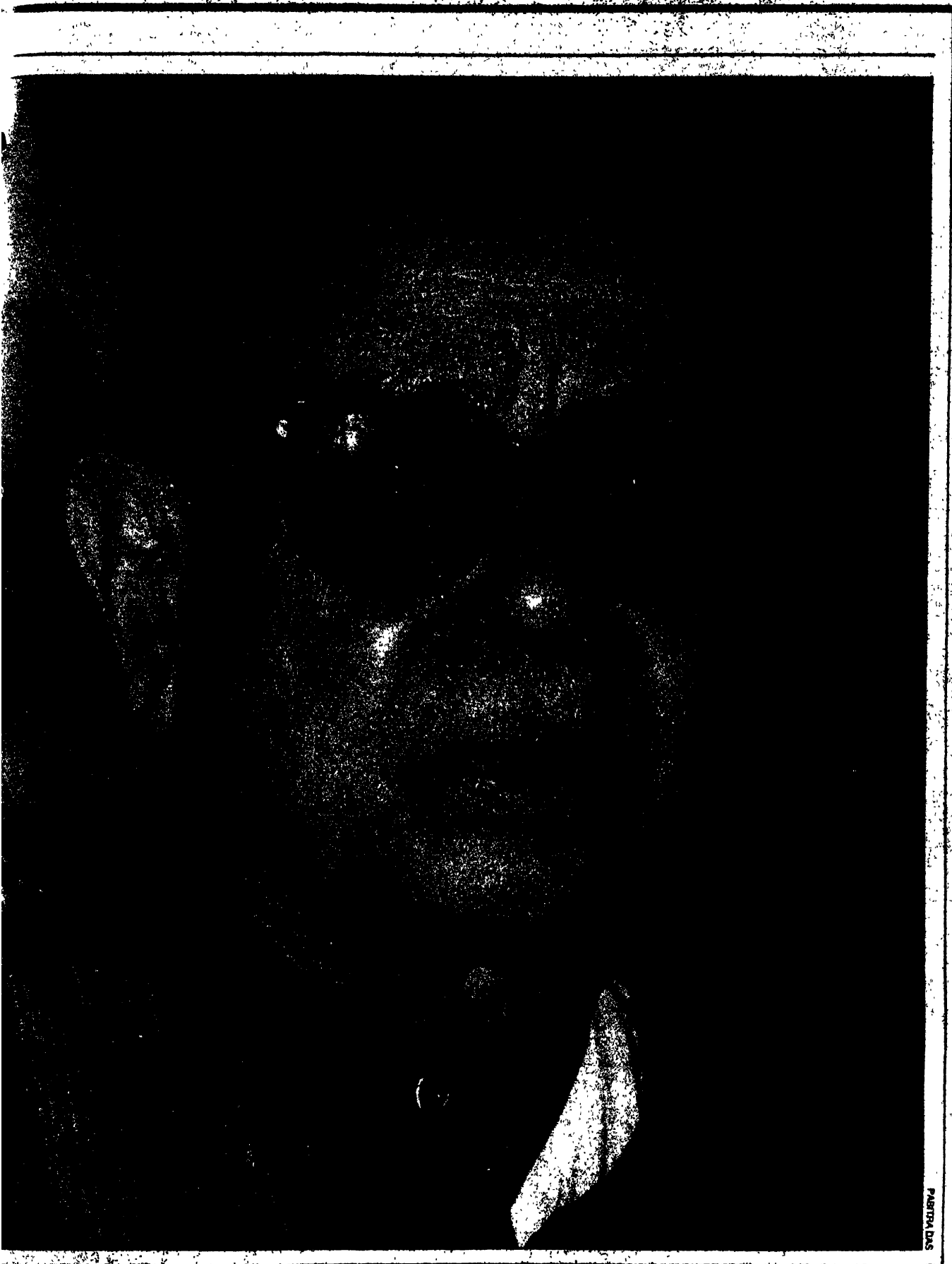
Thakre had two other young contemporaries: Dattopant Thengadi and Manik Chandra Vajpayee. When Thengadi was given the responsibility of the *sangh parivar*, Thakre got the job of creating a base for the party. He did a commendable job, going deep into villages and hamlets to recruit members.

Like all other RSS workers, Thakre avoided publicity, lived simply and spoke gently, always. Everyone thought he was a pushover. In fact, he is a committed, deeply stubborn man who says what he believes. This trait keeps getting him into trouble.

Despite his famed organisational skills, Thakre has shown himself to be completely innocent of personal politics. He let himself be drawn into the politicking in the BJP's Madhya Pradesh unit, choosing to side with Sundarlal Patwa. This created so many problems that he had to be brought to Delhi. But he managed to avoid the other pitfalls of recruitment: he kept the capitalist and feudal elements out of the BJP in MP, unlike the Rajasthan and Maharashtra units.

With all this experience, how can Thakre keep going so wrong? Simply because he has no understanding of realpolitik. The RSS overlooks his ineptitude at handling the media. He has never been in Parliament except for a brief stint in 1977 when he was elected to the Lok Sabha in a by-election. How can a party which is in government afford to have a president who is an organisational genius but a political simpleton?

Clearly the BJP too is coming round to the view that it can't. So don't expect Thakre to get another term as party president if the BJP comes to power again. A good man in the wrong job at the wrong time. That's Kushabhau Thakre. •



PATRICK DUB

Can there be a consensus on economic issues in a multi-party democracy such as ours?

COLOUR

At the end of a certain state dinner, a harassed gent, as gents are likely to be, remarked in exasperation to his neighbour, "Women take everything so personally. They cannot imagine things in general." The lady seated next to him remarked, "No, I am not like that!"

At the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) conference held in the capital recently all political parties swore that they were 'not like that'. That they all were committed to a consensus. But that's as far from reality as far can be. If there are four political parties, then there are four different types of consensus that they would like to reach. Says Dr. Amir Mitra, secretary general, FICCI, trying to put up a brave front: "But we have held discussions for the past four months with all the important leaders from all political parties. Individually they have all agreed to the need for a common national agenda to govern the nation. The passing of the Finance Bill reflects their commitment to a consensus." But can there be a consensus in a polity as divided as ours?

The New Economic Policy with its much glorified reforms has catered to just the top 3 per cent of our population. Clearly, there's a fracturing of the body politic with 97 per cent of the population seeking to find representation through politics based on cast, community and region. To eliminate conflicts from escalating, a consensus on the wider gamut of economic issues seems to be the order of the day. As Pranab Mukherjee, member, Congress Working Committee, puts it: "The need arises out of commitment and compulsion." "But the consensus should only provide directions to the government. You cannot expect a consensus on details," warns finance minister Yashwant Sinha. Are such individual pronouncements at such gatherings conducive to better policy-



PRANAB MUKHERJEE,
Congress

"The only way to combat fiscal deficit is by eliminating revenue deficit"

making? For an analysis of economic policy making it is essential that the policy-maker unravels interrelationships amongst the key variables to achieve the desired goals. And in the larger interests of the nation, at least the possibility of an issue-based convergence of views warrants a scrutiny.

"The acute paucity of investible resources has resurfaced time and again as the incorrigible fiscal deficit. But the classical recipe prescribes fiscal deficit to develop social and economic investment," says Sitaram Yechuri, senior member, CPI(M) Politburo. "Harping on fiscal management reflects fiscal fundamentalism," he adds. What seems to

elude him is that fiscal deficit financed through borrowings is being used in India for current consumption expenditure. And with borrowings threatening to lead us into an internal debt trap, apart from driving up interest rates, fiscal management cannot be stalled any further. According to Pranab Mukherjee: "The only way to combat fiscal deficit is by eliminating revenue deficit." Supporting his views, Sinha adds: "We can agree on eliminating revenue deficit in the next two to three years and after that fiscal deficit would automatically come down to two per cent of the GDP. We can live with fiscal deficit of this magnitude." While their intentions seemed sincere one can't help wondering how they will augment their resources.

It was heartening to hear Sinha endorse Yechuri's suggestion of taxing the rural rich to raise resources. Suggesting that this politically explosive option could be a part of his famous second generation reforms, he added: "States can look at this option for shoring up their resources." But how feasible is this option?

OF MONEY



**YASHWANT SINHA,
BJP**

"By eliminating revenue deficit, fiscal deficit would automatically come down"

Even within urban areas which are concentrated pockets, millions evade taxes, even though incomes are fairly well-defined within the secondary and tertiary sectors. Widening the net to the rural rich is impossible as they are spread all over the country. Moreover, in agriculture there is no account-keeping as incomes are ill-defined. Says Arun Kumar, professor of Economics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, "Share of agriculture is falling in the GDP. So you must target the tertiary income whose buoyancy is high." "You are barking up the wrong tree," says Jairam Ramesh, joint secretary, AICC. "No political party will touch the rural rich. It is a bogus



**SITARAM YECHURI,
CPI(M)**

"Harping on fiscal management reflects fiscal fundamentalism"

claim." Hence neither in the political perspective nor from the point of view of Economics does this appear a viable suggestion.

So what are the remaining options? The finance minister suggests increasing user charges and cutting subsidies. Admits he: "This is an area in which we are prepared to beat each other with the longest and strongest stick we can get." Disagrees Jay Dubashi, economist, BJP: "Agriculture is still unprotected despite input subsidies. The reforms have just targeted industry and the financial markets. There can be no question of cutting subsidies to agriculture." Concessions to industry to make it competi-

tive contribute to making India a high subsidy regime. But streamlining the delivery mechanism for subsidies and better targeting are easier said than done. A case in point is the Public Distribution System (PDS). Says Bibek Debroy, economist, The Rajiv Gandhi Foundation: "The per unit cost of Food Corporation of India's operations is higher than that of private traders. The PDS has a pro-urban bias—the dependence of the poor on the PDS in rural areas is around 16 per cent. For every rupee spent on the poor through the PDS, around 20 paise reaches target beneficiaries."

To tackle poverty there has to be a better way. But for any meaningful investment in social or economic infrastructure, we must generate resources. Sinha suggests downsizing. But he adds: "The government cannot be downsized unless there is a political consensus on which of its functions can be shed." With Sitaram Yechuri emphasising the role of government intervention in development of social and economic infrastructure, a consensus seems unlikely in the near future.

Neither is a consensus likely on reforms in Public Sector Enterprises (PSEs). About half of the 240 central PSEs are loss-making with some of them having piled up losses exceeding their net worth. A similar fate has struck the state-level PSEs. Divesting equity in PSEs and using the proceeds to retiring public debt seem logical. But the Achilles' heel in restructuring is the question of dealing with the workforce. There is no consensus on blocking this drain on our resources. In China, downsizing is a reality. Defending the Left's stance, Mr Yechuri emphasises the need for proper safety nets in the form of unemployment insurance as exists in China. That makes the opening up of the insurance sector imperative.

But we are yet to reach a consensus on that. Is there no feasible option then to boost our rates of growth?

Says Debroy: "Without growth all redistributive measures amount to a

WHY CONSENSUS...

- Of 157 countries, India ranks 124 on the basis of per capita income
- As regards purchasing power parity, India is at 126
- India's human development index rank is 139
- In terms of the international poverty line of US\$ 1 per day, 36 per cent of the world's poor reside in India and 50 per cent of Indians are poor.

redistribution of poverty. Cross-country empirical studies show that trickle-down does work — it becomes a gushing-down mechanism. But it works only if economies grow at 8 per cent or more over a sustained period of time." To achieve such rates, the demand recession that has manifested must be reversed. Says Yechuri, "Land reforms must ensure economic wherewithal to the masses to boost domestic demand required for industrial growth. The reform process must encompass them to be successful." It is music to one's ears to hear the finance minister agree to such land reform-

ms. Says he, "The bulk of demand must come from the rural areas I have also believed this." But land reforms will not suffice. To boost domestic demand we have to create non-agricultural income within the rural sector. The 67 per cent of population stuck in agriculture have to be given alternative means of livelihood. And that obviously entails investment in rural infrastructure. Hence to arrive at a consensus consulting the states is inevitable. Explains Mukherjee: "Even with an absolute majority in Parliament and Congress governments in most of the states I could not achieve a

consensus on major economic decisions." But Sinha reassures that several states have signed MOUs with the Centre to induct fiscal discipline in their functioning. And if that be a continuing trend, reaching a consensus at least on fiscal management may not be just wishful thinking. It is true that this initiative is a bold one, especially in current times when coalitions seem here to stay.

But can a consensus ever develop on issues like the black economy which has a magnitude of almost 7 lakh crore every year? Why is India such a high cost economy despite dirt-cheap labour? It is because of the large transactional costs related to black economy that add 80 to 90 per cent to costs. Despite doing away with the licence raj and other controls this phenomenon permeates every sphere of professional activity in our economy. Says Professor Arun Kumar, JNU: "All technical suggestion like bearer bonds, voluntary disclosure schemes,

"The reforms have just targeted industry and the financial markets. There can be no question of cutting subsidies to agriculture"

have failed to check it. Numerous committees have submitted reports. It has to be dealt at political economy level." Direct taxes in India are paid by 13-14 million people (1.4 per cent of our population) instead of the 50 million who should be paying. Hence we should be collecting Rs 3 lakh crore and not the paltry sum of 45,000 crore that we receive. If this black economy is in control the fiscal regime would come into the orbit where one could reduce the indirect taxes without having to subsidise. Consequently heavy borrowings and the heavy interest burden would be a thing of the past. Revenue deficit, given time, could be converted to a revenue surplus. That would settle the question of investible resources that has tormented our finance ministers for ages. So have they seriously hunted for solutions?

Obviously not, for there's no political will to tackle such a sensitive issue. After all they cannot commence on such a suicidal venture. So till the time such hard decisions are taken any pursuit of a consensus is child's prattle that must be ignored. •

Devdatta Das/New Delhi



JAY DUBASHI, BJP

Sandeshe aaten hain

The nation writes to the Indian jawan

When it's 15,000 feet, bitterly cold and only a bullet between life and death, you can never imagine the comfort of receiving a message of love.

All it took was one advertisement, and the letters came pouring in. It wasn't that the 76-year-old freedom fighter had stopped caring about his country. Or that the six-year-old girl didn't know about the *jawan* in Kargil risking his life for her.

How could they not know? Each day newspapers are full of stories of acts of courage on the Kargil border. And how could the people of India not care for the soldiers out there? Only they didn't quite know how to express their gratitude.

It was this emotion that the Delhi-based People's Action (PA) appealed to when it placed an advertisement in the national dailies asking the citizen to pick up a pen and write to the *jawan* in Kargil.

Sanjaya, a founder member of People's Action, describes it as "a group of people who think alike and agree on the same things, having a cadre of young, thinking professionals". His colleague Sanjeev adds, "Ours is an essentially non-political organisation."

The reason why people like Sanjaya and Sanjeev got together to set up such a forum is very simple. "We want to shake the people of this country out of their lethargy. We want to tell them that each one of us makes a difference and everyone's opinion counts," explains Sanjaya.

The first time PA made its presence felt was through an advertisement in *The Indian Express* criticising the Congress's attitude of making a mockery of the Delhi-Lahore bus service by putting up a balloon in the shape of an upturned bus. Its second advertisement focused on the action in Kargil.

And the response was overwhelming.

"People had been frustrated for a long time. Our advertisement gave them hope, a chance to give a vent to their bottled-up feelings," said Sanjaya. The PA has been receiving around 30 to 40 e-mails and 400 letters daily. The letters, from all over India, are handed over to the defence ministry to be distributed at the frontier posts.

RUPINDER SHARMA

I PRAY FOR YOU EVERYDAY

DEAR FAUJIS,

I am a 4 year old boy.

I love you very much & would like to become like you

WITH LOTS OF LOVE & GOOD WISHES

PRATYUSH

When it's 15,000 ft, bitterly cold and only a bullet between life and death, you can never imagine the comfort of receiving a message of love.

I hundreds of emotional Indians have written and e-mailed us to say that they truly feel, appreciate and value the sacrifices that Indian Jawans make for the country's safety and security.

Feelings have no meaning. Unless they're expressed. Pick up your pen now and write out your feelings for the brave Jawans on any piece of paper. Tell them that you understand. Tell them that you care. Tell them that every one of us will carry out our part of the responsibility. Tell them their families are our families. Tell them they have nothing to fear. Tell them they are invincible, because 900 million Indians stand with them. Tell them your name. And tell them that you will wait for them.

Your letter or post card will be delivered to the Defence Ministry for onward distribution to the frontier posts. Send your letter/card to The Indian Jawan, c/o People's Action, at the address below.

People's Action

The People's Action Centre is a non-profit organisation. It is not a political party. It is a forum for people to express their views and feelings. It is not a pressure group. It is a platform for people to express their views and feelings. It is not a political party. It is a forum for people to express their views and feelings. It is not a pressure group. It is a platform for people to express their views and feelings.

"This country has been starved of any real role models. People want to believe in someone. The children need to look up to someone," said Sanjeev

The letter-writers range from school-children to corporate heads, ex-servicemen and housewives. A young girl has sent 16 handmade cards with a small poem in each.

A four-year-old boy has scrawled that he wanted to become like the '*faujis*' when he grows up, while another child applauds the '*bravery*' of the Indian soldiers.

The grown-ups are equally expressive.

In his letter, Pradeep K. Sahu has complained that the action in Kargil has been given less importance than the World Cup. Sushil Kumar Tyagi, a 78-year-old

freedom fighter, gives vent to another kind of emotion: "I used to carry our flag on the streets and fight the enemy. Now I don't have the same strength left in me. But I tell you '*dushman ke daunt khatte karva do*'."

Explaining the reason for such a mind-blowing response, Sanjeev said, "This country has been starved of any real role models. People want to believe in someone. The children need to look up to someone."

And no role model can be more real than the soldiers. •

Garima Kalra/New Delhi

Waiting List

Attempts by the caretaker government to reorganise the finances of Indian Airlines run into trouble

While the President of India, K.R. Narayanan, has opposed the decision of the Union government to restructure the finances of Indian Airlines (IA), ministers and powerful bureaucrats are trying to convince the Rashtrapati Bhavan to change its position on the issue.

Government officials want to recast the equity capital of the public sector as the domestic aviation corporation cannot wait for four months till a new government is in place. But the mandarins in the President's secretariat are reportedly equally adamant that there is no great urgency to push through the proposal to infuse fresh capital into IA.

Those opposed to the revamp proposal are urging the President to stick to his position on the ground that the caretaker government headed by Prime Minister

Atal Behari Vajpayee should not be allowed to go ahead with a scheme which would significantly affect the future of IA.

The problems being faced by IA are not new. It was in May 1993 when the then civil aviation minister Ghulam Nabi Azad announced a "merger" of the loss-making Vayudoot with IA. He also announced a five-year moratorium on repayment of dues of Vayudoot which ended in May 1998.

Vayudoot's equity capital used to be held by IA and Air-India in equal proportions of 50 per cent. Then, Air-India's share was picked up by IA resulting in Vayudoot becoming a 100 per cent subsidiary of the latter.

The problems which arose out of the so-called merger of Vayudoot and IA continue to haunt the latter. Vayudoot's losses were estimated to be around Rs

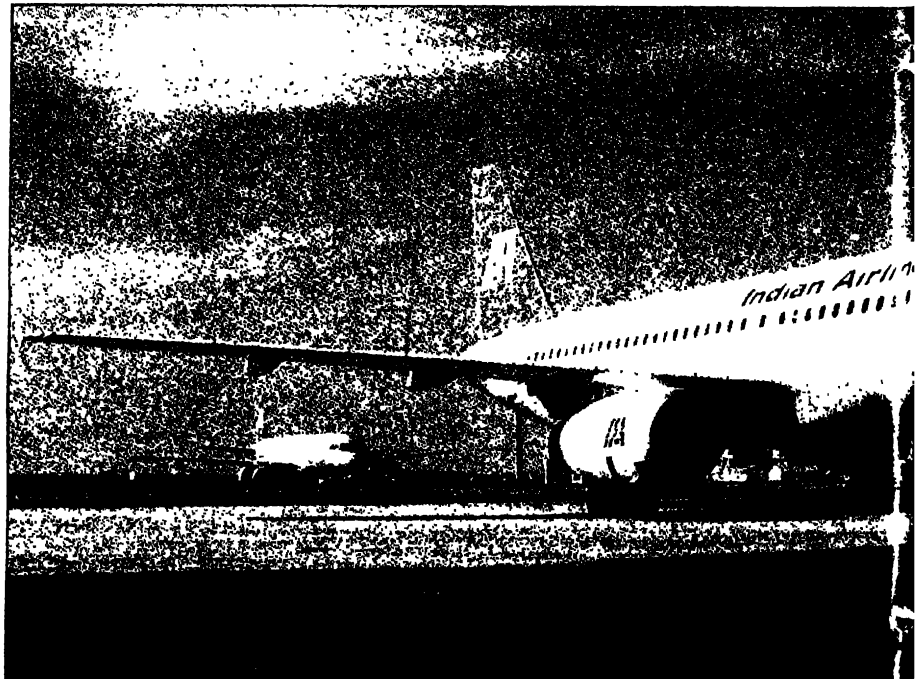
200 crore but no proper audit has been done of its accounts.

In fact, it is said that some of the relevant documents on Vayudoot's finances cannot even be located. (And IA's accounts currently do not reflect the losses incurred by Vayudoot nor for that matter, does it reflect the finances of IA's other wholly-owned subsidiary, Alliance Air).

In 1997, during the United Front government, an official committee set up to revamp IA, headed by Vijay Kelkar (who was then the petroleum secretary), submitted its recommendations. These included an infusion of fresh equity capital by the government into Indian Airlines before "disinvesting" the corporation's shares to the general public. Many of these suggestions did not find favour with the ministry of finance,



ATAL BEHARI VAJPAYEE



INDIAN AIRLINES

though they were generally acceptable to the ministry of civil aviation.

The first Budget of the Vajpayee government announced by finance minister Yashwant Sinha in June 1998 proposed that 51 per cent of shares of IA should be disinvested over a three-year period after an infusion of equity capital to the tune of Rs 125 crore by the Government of India. This move, however, did not come through.

The expenditure Budget for the current year 1999-2000 indicates that the amount of Rs 125 crore which was sanctioned in the previous year had not been spent. Curiously, Sinha's second Budget makes niggardly provision of an investment worth Rs 1 lakh for IA!

On 9 May, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved an infusion of Rs 325 crore into IA — Rs 200 crore more than the amount mentioned earlier to take into account the Vayudoot's losses. The Cabinet also announced a two-year extension of the moratorium on repayment of outstanding dues to the government.

Cabinet note prepared by bureaucrats reportedly stated that "it is expected" that IA would be able to raise Rs 760 crore by "disinvesting" its shares in the market. This "disinvestment" scheme presumes that either there would be buyers for IA shares among the general public or that a "strategic partner" would pick up a large chunk of IA shares.

In late May, after officials in the President's secretariat expressed Rashtrapati Bhavan's disapproval of the disinvestment scheme by writing to the Cabinet secretariat, the latter wrote back stating that the government would nevertheless like to infuse Rs 125 crore as fresh equity capital into IA.

Cabinet secretary Prabhat Kumar reportedly argued against the objections raised by Rashtrapati Bhavan, namely that there was no urgency to infuse fresh equity capital at this juncture and that this amount had not in any case been sanctioned in the Union Budget approved by Parliament.

The real issues, aviation expert Joseph Thomas argues, are quite different. The fact is that IA has improved its finances despite competition from private

K.R. NARAYANAN



Those opposed to the revamp proposal are urging the President to stick to his position on the ground that the caretaker government should not be allowed to go ahead with the scheme

airlines, he points out. IA's losses have come down steadily from Rs 265 crore in 1993-94 to Rs 189 the following year and Rs 110 crore the year after that (1995-96).

In 1996-97, IA's losses came down further to less than Rs 15 crore. The following year, the corporation made a marginal profit in 1998-99. Indian Airlines' annual accounts indicate a profit of Rs 45 crore.

"I believe these profits are meagre considering IA's annual turnover of Rs 3,000 crore," says Thomas. Even the profits shown are notional since the accounts are riddled with qualifications made by government auditors (of the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India), he adds.

Thomas is of the view that an infusion of Rs 125 crore of fresh equity into IA would be like throwing good money after bad. "Vayudoot's losses have not yet been brought into IA's books and yet the corporation as well as the ministry are making a big noise about it. The fact is that Vayudoot's losses are being borne by its creditors who haven't been paid for over six years now," he said.

He points out that IA would be able to garner resources only if it issues fresh shares and not by selling the government's shares in the market. Then comes the question of making IA's shares sufficiently attractive to the general investor or to a prospective strategic partner. "The real book value of IA is either zero or negative," says Thomas.

"The accounts of Vayudoot have not been prepared. So how can these be audited? If this was a private company, its directors would have been in deep trouble, perhaps even in jail, for violating the law. Certain officials are indulging in a campaign of disinformation and it is not at all clear how IA would be able to raise a sum in excess of Rs 750 crore by selling its shares in the market," he claimed.

According to Thomas, the real reason why IA wants a fresh infusion of funds is that it wants to operate flights from Delhi and Mumbai to destinations like Frankfurt, Geneva, Rome and Manchester routes which have been vacated by Air-India. In order to operate these new flights, IA would need substantial funds to lease aircraft.

Despite the attempts being made by the caretaker government to revamp the finances of IA, it is clear that this will not happen in a hurry. •

Paranjoy Guha Thakurta/New Delhi



Surprised by the success of *Hyderabad Blues*, Nagesh Kukunoor, actor-director-producer has taken to full-time movie-making. *Hyderabad Blues*, a narrative and an easy-going movie made on a shoe-string budget with its quick success has made other megabuck producers go green in the face. But it has also started a new and healthy trend, prompting many young directors to launch similar films.

Nagesh, now about to wrap up his second film

OUT OF THE BLUE



Nagesh Kukunoor: will his luck hold?

Rockford has already announced his next project *Bollywood Calling*. The film narrates the tale of an aspiring actor who comes to Bollywood in the hope of making it big and the heartbreak he suffers trying to make his dreams come true.

Nagesh is on the look-out for a Hollywood star to play the lead role. The movie will be shot mainly in Hollywood and partly in Bombay. The film is expected to start rolling in August. Will the *Bollywood Call* make *Hyderabad Blues* better?

FACING THE BRICKBATS

Udham Singh (alias Munish Makhija) will for once have to face the *danda* if he uses it. Sounds whacky — but that's the way life treats you if you



Udham Singh: seeking self

walk out of the programme which gives you a new identity.

Singh has walked out from Channel V to Sony television. And while Sony is thrilled, Channel V is not. Singh has been told in a stern voice that he will have to return back the Haryanvi garbs to his former employers. Singh is unperturbed: "No one can have a copyright on ideas."

True, but there is something called ethics — right? And no amount of wielding Jat abuses will help.

A thought: since few people know his real name, Singh will have a tough time finding a new identity. Once a Udham always a Udham!

RING OUT THE OLD



Yet another veejay has been bitten by the Bollywood bug. After Kamal Sidhu's unsuccessful stint, Sophia Haque makes her debut in Hindi films by shaking a shapely leg or two in a few dance numbers in *Khubsorat*. So what if she can't speak Hindi, she has what it takes to get the audience to hoot.

But everyone has to pay a price for fame and Sophia is no exception to the rule. In a major reshuffle, Channel V has decided to do away with most of their veejays and Sophia too is facing the axe. That she has been with the channel since it was launched is not enough — Channel V prefers new faces and more *desi maal* and Sophia does not fit the bill.

But she's not complaining. She feels she's got a bigger fish to fry.

Sophia Haque: greener pastures



It is a process of discovery for most visitors to the Peabody Essex Museum in USA which is currently hosting an exhibition of the works of 13 of India's leading contemporary artists.

Timeless Visions: Contemporary Art of India gives the layperson as well as the connoisseur an opportunity to experience 13 Indian

SEEING IS BELIEVING

grandmasters at one time. Despite the efforts made by collectors like Chester Herwitz, India and Indian art still manages to evoke images of temples, elephants and snake-charmers. This exhibition is an effort to make the international art



world aware of the energetic and modern India and its evolved art movement through the works of contemporary Indian artists.

The works of Bikash Bhattacharjee, K.G. Ramanujam, Manjit Bawa, Rekha Rodwittitya, R.H. Raza, Vinod Dave and M.F. Husain are part of the exhibition and many of these artists were present at the opening function. Also seen were a number of dignitaries and Indian business leaders like Shashi Tripathi, Indian consul-general in New York, Dr Hugo Weihe, director, department of Indian Art, Christie's Inc, New York, among others.

The display at Peabody Essex Museum, known for its collection of art, architecture and culture from across the world hosts around 1,50,000 people each year, will



Paintings on display at the Peabody Essex Museum

ensure that contemporary Indian art gets a wide reach.

WHITE MAGIC

Another summer line has reached the fashion markets. In an effort to make hay while the 'sun shines' fashion designer Jattin Kocchar has brought out his summer collection. It offers a wide range of colours and styles and promises to be a feast for the eyes. Taking a break from his traditional style, Jattin has used a lot of white in his new collection.

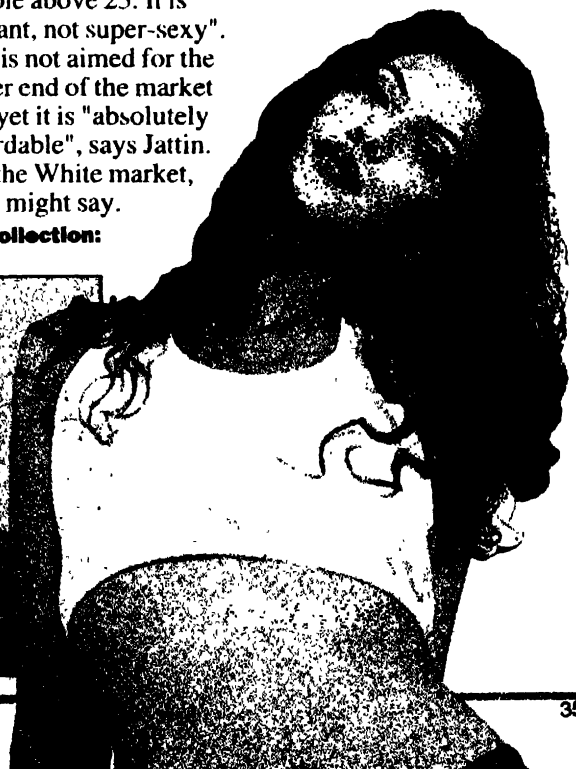
"Since I do only western outfits, I had shied away from using white and concentrated on darker colours", says Jattin. Besides whites, soothing colours like lemon, beige, pastel blue and pale gray have also been used.

This is also the first time that Jattin has done a fusion of Indo-Western styles. Says Jattin, "The

line caters mostly to people above 25. It is elegant, not super-sexy".

It is not aimed for the lower end of the market and yet it is "absolutely affordable", says Jattin. For the White market, you might say.

Jattin Kocchar (inset) and his new collection: summer of '99





AZZA!

*In defence of the
Indian skipper*



On 31 December, 1984, India was playing its third test match against the touring English cricket team. The early morning haze and dew made the ball swing and wobble. Fast bowlers Neil Cowans and Ellison took full advantage of these favourable conditions, thus making life miserable for the Indian team. Four Indian batsmen including Sunny Gavaskar, Mohinder Amarnath and Vengsarkar were back in the pavillion with barely 127 runs on the board. The English team seemed ready to go for the jugular when a tall, wiry loose-limbed batsman, wearing an ill-sized helmet, walked into the batting crease to upset their plans.

The sports-crazy spectators of Calcutta had little clue about this young batsman who seemed amazingly at ease for his maiden test. The public address system announced the arrival of Mohammad Azharuddin, but that did not make much sense till he started unveiling his repertoire of amazing strokes. He cut and cover drove imperiously when a batsman of any class would have settled for a defensive plod. More importantly, Azhar executed these shots in a manner that made the entire exercise look extremely aesthetic. There was no ungainly heave or cross-batted shot, every stroke was a sum-total of sharp reflex and good technique where his wrist played a major role. "Azhar would not hit a shot if it did not look beautiful," commented a columnist later.

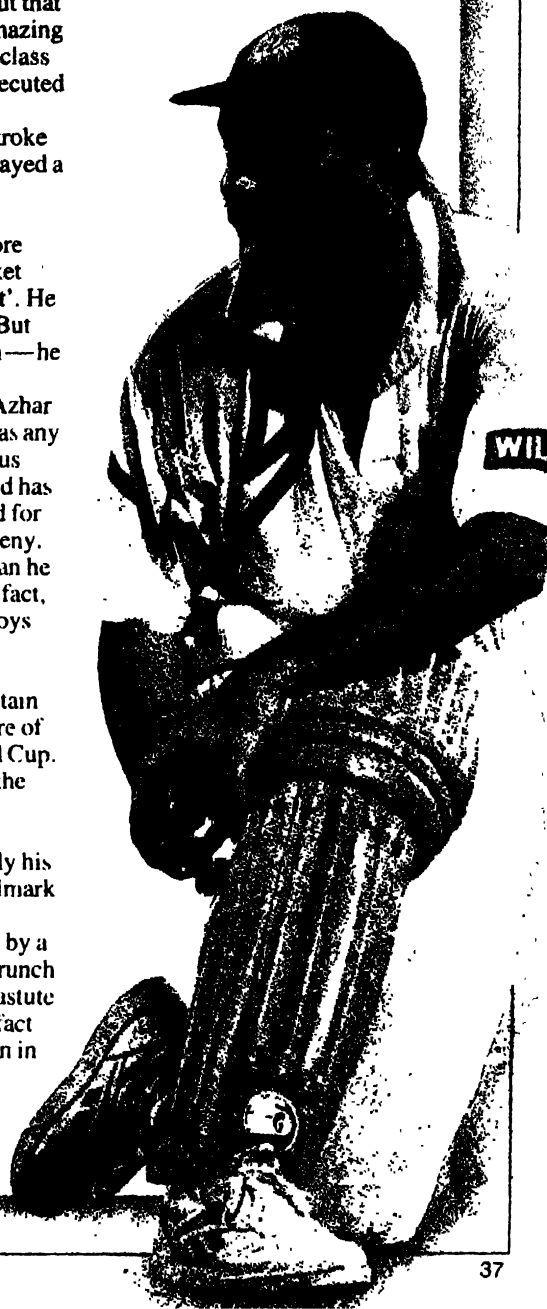
After the century at Eden Gardens, Azhar followed it with two more back-to-back centuries in Madras and Kanpur. So ecstatic were cricket lovers that a famous cricketer called him 'God's gift to Indian cricket'. He was compared with another wristy stroke player, G.R. Vishwanath. But Azhar, in one way, was different from all those he was compared with—he was lucky.

Appointed as captain of the Indian cricket team to New Zealand, Azhar has driven both his fans and detractors to desperation. While no one has any doubts about his batting, it is his captaincy that has come under serious scrutiny. His laid-back attitude and refusal to throw his weight around has not met with the approval of cricket purists. Azhar has been criticised for being uncommunicative and inarticulate. A charge that he does not deny. In fact, his post-match television interviews are a proof of how Spartan he is with his words. Nearly all his replies revolve around the 'boys'. In fact, Azharspeak is being elevated to the level of Ajitspeak with college boys trying hard to copy him.

Called '*Muqadder Ka Siqander*' for being the most successful captain India has seen, Azhar's luck could well desert him after the failure of the Indian cricket team to enter the semi-final stage of the 1999 World Cup. He has been bitterly criticised by the likes of Bishen Singh Bedi and the Nawab of Pataudi and held responsible for India's early exit from the World Cup. This was in spite of the fact that Azharuddin probably performed better as a skipper than ever before in his career. It was only his batting that looked jaded and brittle. His much-vaunted rhythm, a hallmark of his batting, seemed to have deserted him.

Save for the disaster of the match against Zimbabwe that India lost by a whisker, India seemed capable of entering the last four stage. In the crunch matches against England and Pakistan, Azharuddin made extremely astute bowling changes and choked the opposition. This was in spite of the fact that India had posted small totals. Sunny Gavaskar had little hesitation in stating that Azharuddin deserved the man of the match award.

ASHOKE CHAKRABARTY



ON THE FLIP SIDE...

He has never been easy to get on with. A shy, quiet middle-class boy, fame and glamour were thrust on Azharuddin when he became captain of the Indian cricket team in 1990 after a stirring performance with the bat in the 1980s.

But the Hyderabad boy showed a remarkable affinity for glamour and all the good things of life. Today he wears Gucci shoes and suits from Armani.

The shy manner becomes defensive when under attack. When confronted with vitriol chucked out by Bishen Singh Bedi or mild criticism from Sunil Gavaskar, Azharuddin's reaction is: 'They're jealous of me'. This is absurd, surely? How can a Gavaskar or a Bedi be jealous of mere strippling? They've seen it all.

It would help if Azharuddin did a little introspection and tried to understand why he has always got a bad press. Even sharp questions put to him by the press have a way of throwing him into a contemptuous rage.

A list of those who feel Azharuddin should be axed from the Indian team forthwith:



■ **BISHEN SINGH BEDI:** He feels Azharuddin has been an unimaginative captain with no ideas of his own. Azhar himself always says that every member of the Indian team is a test player and knows what he has to do on the field. But if every one knows what they have to do, what's a captain for?



■ **DILIP VENGSAKAR:** Has always said that Azhar is wrong for the captaincy. Is repeating that now. He believes the captain has a very important role in leading the team to victory. Azhar's performance, both in the way he has batted and in the way he has led the team, has been pathetic.



■ **SUNIL GAVASKAR:** Feels the management of the Indian team is more to blame than Azhar for the poor performance of the team. The Indians played too much cricket, had an itinerary which was too cramped and spent too much time on travel.

■ **THE BCCI:** Although the president of the Board of Cricket Control of India (BCCI), Raj Singh Dungarpur, has always supported Azhar, another official who is still a selector, P.M. Rungta has been telling his colleagues that they're wrong — that Azhar should be thrown out because he is the wrong person to choose as captain of the team.

Bedi, who takes part in the television chat show and spews venom at Azharuddin, was also rendered speechless after his strong showing. But he was back in business attacking Azhar and deriving immense pleasure from the manner in which a section of the cricket fans chose to demonise the mild-mannered Indian captain for all that is wrong with the cricket team. Bedi who built up so much pressure to have Sachin Tendulkar open the Indian inning in spite of the fact that he was performing well at number four, had egg on his face when Sachin failed in successive matches. It was apparent that the Indian cricket think tank should have shown greater faith in their instincts and ignored the advice of those who have a massive chip on their shoulder. Azhar is convinced that the captain can only perform as well as the other team members allow him to. He also claims that all the players know their job and they need not be tutored like children.

Whatever any one might say, Azharuddin has to perform doubly hard at different levels. Being a Hyderabad Muslim, Azharuddin has had to contend with snide remarks from people. His 'loyalty' has been questioned. In matches against Pakistan, Azharuddin is constantly under scrutiny. Communal elements that are legion constantly look for opportunities to show how Azharuddin cannot help India attain greatness in cricket. But his amazing track record should silence them. Not only is Azhar the most enduring cricketer India has seen, his record as captain does not need cosmetic manipulation to look attractive.

He has played, Colin Croft says, as many one-day internationals as there are days in a year. Azhar has scored more than 9000 runs in one-day internationals and taken 153 catches showing his amazing fitness. Even now he sprints faster than any other in the team. His fielding is a treat to watch. And his batting too can come good after the two-month break. Azhar has refused to take the blame for the debacle experienced by the Indian team. He has had a heart-warming victory against Pakistan to show that he has it in him to lead the Indian cricket team in future too. However, his continuance would be contingent on whether the Board of Cricket Control (BCCI) wilts under the exertions of the likes of Bedi and makes Azhar the scapegoat for India's World Cup misadventure. •

Sanjay Kapoor

BENDRE



SUSHMITA SEN

It's clearly a good time for tall, leggy beauties who don't look like the

archetypal Hindi film heroine. Or else, why would both Sushmita Sen and Sonali Bendre be on such a high?

While Sushmita is still basking in the success of *Biwi No. 1* and the rave reviews of her performance in *Sirf Tum*, Sonali finally has a bona-fide hit to her credit with *Sarfarosh*. Both of them had waited for a long time in the sidelines and richly deserve this somewhat belated success.

But what does this mean for that other leggy model, Pooja Batra? Is her time coming too, or has she just missed the bus?



SONY ALI

Not that Somy can take much comfort from that. After all, Salman's next fancy may not be quite so unavailable.

So, Kajol is back from her honeymoon and settling down to life as Mrs Ajay Devgan. But is she ready to start making movies again?

By the look of things, not for a long time yet. Apparently, Kajol had really let herself go on her honeymoon, gorging on all those European delicacies — think chocolate and ice-cream — and doing no exercise whatsoever. Result: a



KAJOL

newly podgy Kajol who needs to shed at least 10 kilos before she can face the cameras again.

Well, that's as good an excuse as any for not getting back to work. •

Sanjay Dutt's luck at the box-office may not survive the disaster called

Safari. Playing a modern-day Tarzan to Juhi Chawla's Jane, Sanjay puts in what is probably the worst performance of his career. But to be fair, the blame is not entirely on him. In a film as execrable as this, what else could you expect of him?

But Dutt does need to get his act together if he wants to salvage what is left of his career. After all, there is a time limit to how long you can live off your past triumphs.



SANJAY DUTT

Now that Aishwarya Rai has turned down Salman Khan's proposal, Somy Ali is flying back to India to see if she can salvage anything from her on-again-off-again relationship with Salman.

Just one word of warning for the long-suffering Somy. Salman's roving eye is as mobile as ever. His latest fancy is apparently the sexy Bipasha Basu. But alas, Bips is so much in love with Dino Morea — the Siddhanth of *Pyaar Mein Kabhi Kabhi*, that she didn't have as much as a thought to spare for Salman.

Former dacoits transform a West Bengal village

The villagers of Sonakania fall asleep by 8 pm; 20 years back, the village never slept. Sonakania, on the banks of the Subarnarekha river in West Bengal's Midnapore district, was once notorious for its dacoits. Today, it has transformed itself into a model of conservation and development.

Any visitor to this village, lying about 200 km west of Calcutta, is at once struck by its emerald greenery. Trees big and small, tall and dwarfish, line the roads and hide the hamlet behind a cover of thick canopy. And the air beneath

high school, had already had a bank of goodwill before he set out to change hearts. He commanded a fair measure of respect even from seasoned criminals for his skills in sword-fencing and other martial arts.

He talked the village elders into backing his mission and even managed to convince a couple of dacoits. It was a wobbly beginning, but Das and the villagers of Sonakania have come a long way since then.

The campaign was based on the rather unusual belief that the planting and nurturing of trees could transform cha-

Change of heart

their dark shades is cool, even in summer, as wind from the river rushes through the foliage.

But what really makes Sonakania stand out are its people, who have made it green. Even 20 years back, the village is said to have looked very different. It was barren and dusty, people were without jobs, and the members of nearly half its families were dacoits. Remote and poorly linked, Sonakania was home to some of the toughest brigands of the region. Many of them had served prison terms, but remained unrepentant, and people wouldn't dare to venture towards Sonakania after sundown.

Today, it's a village whose ways others would like to emulate.

The process of transformation began with one man's endeavours. Ashok Das, 45, a school teacher and among the very few literate persons in the village, felt he had a personal mission to change the place he called his home. And this desire to make a difference was born out of the fact that his own house had been looted twice. He had seen dacoits raid his house, once when he was 12, and again about 20 years later.

Das, a physical trainer in a nearby

racters. "That's what I always believed, and continue to do so," says Das, to whom the rearing of plantations is the most creative pursuit on earth.

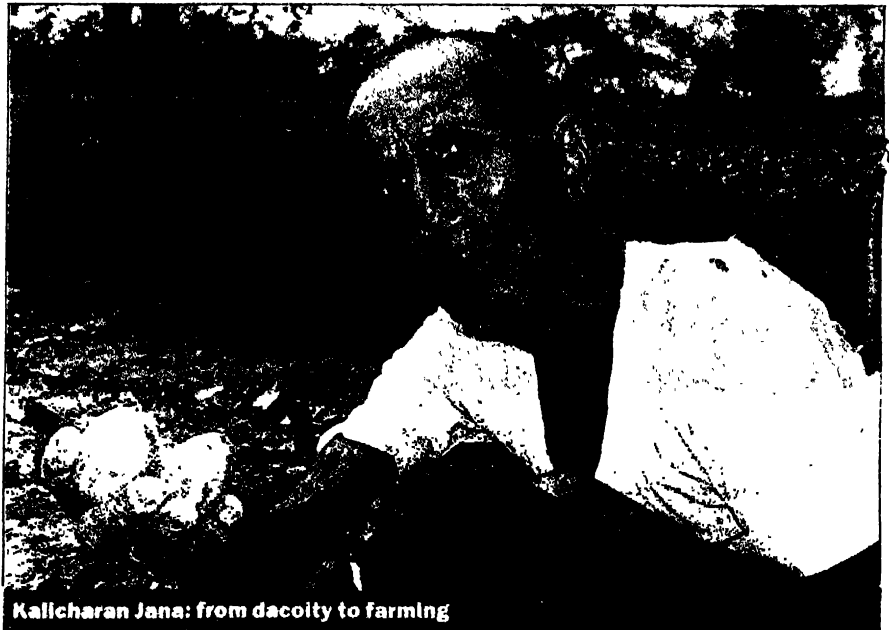
One cannot vouch for the theory's scientific basis, but the sea-change in Sonakania is there for anybody to see.

Dacoits have given up their nocturnal adventure, taken to farming, raising plantations and herds of cattle.

What is more notable is that the entire village has given up drinking and smoking. Even visitors are forbidden to light up or relax with sundowners. The



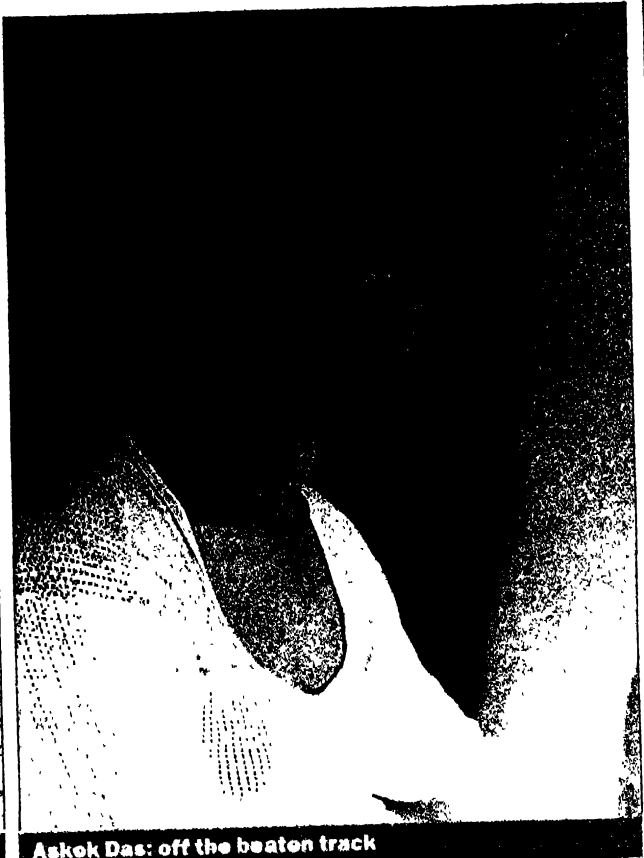
Das (back to camera) giving training to b



Kalicharan Jana: from dacoity to farming



Elders: fighting spirit



Askok Das: off the beaten track



Saplings for planting: trees as saviours

Sonakania was home to some of the toughest brigands. Many of them had served prison terms and people wouldn't dare to venture towards Sonakania after sundown. Today, it's a village whose ways others would like to emulate

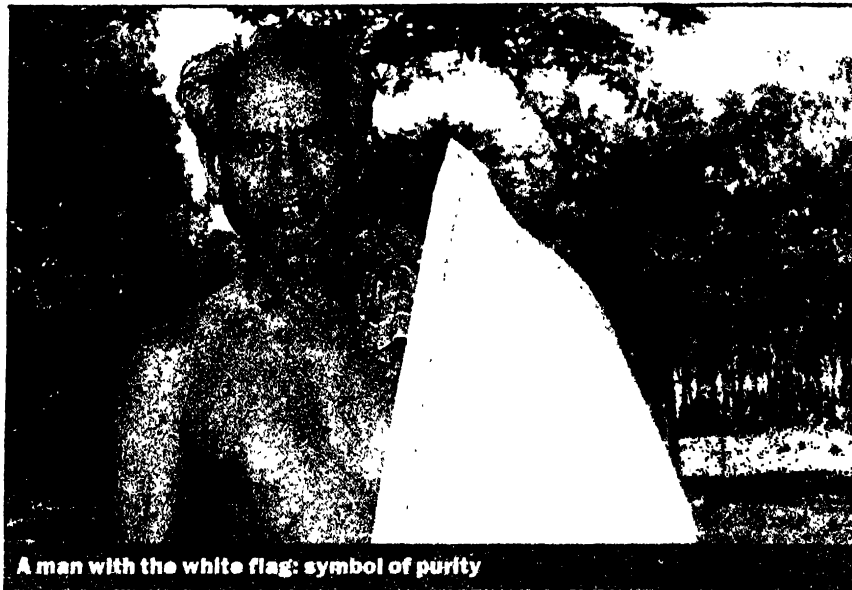
ban became effective from the mid-Eighties and there are few violaters. "By giving up smoking alone, the people are able to save at least Rs 15 per month," estimates Das.

It was the building of a canal by villagers that triggered the changes. A

result of voluntary labour, the canal brought water from the Subarnarekha to parched lands. Earlier, the village could at best manage one crop a year; now, the fields remained green all the year round. Sandy wastelands were reclaimed by the body of elders and distributed among

families to wean them away from crime. And all this was done without any help from the panchayat or any government agency.

In fact, politics and politicians were made to feel unwelcome in Sonakania for nearly a decade. For a long time, it



A man with the white flag: symbol of purity

remained a little enclave in which the government's writ did not run and the people chose to govern themselves. Indeed, the village had, and still has, a flag of its own, symbolising the hamlet's uniqueness. Its colour is white.

On a rough estimate, Sonakanian has about 60,000 trees at present. They are treated as community property and the income from them flows into a common fund. From its sprawling cashew and eucalyptus plantations, the village earns about Rs 20,000 annually. Of this, Rs 10,000 is set aside for irrigation, and the rest for meeting the villagers' medical expenses. The nearest health centre is more than ten km away.

Although the people and the community earn a lot more money today than they did before, barter is the main form of exchange in Sonakanian. It is, interestingly, a system that has been introduced by Das and his followers to curb the influence of money. "We found that people tended to drink and smoke more when they had money in their hand. So we have tried to do away with it as far as possible," he says. The decision was taken unanimously by the villagers after months of discussions.

Rice, instead of money, is used for buying essentials. A cake of soap, for instance, costs a kilo of the grain. The practice is catching on even in the neighbouring villages. The reason is that merchants are able to make a tidy profit by selling the rice they collect in nearby grain markets.

Any violation of the norms regulating life in Sonakanian draws curious for-



Children collecting groundnuts: new times

ms punishments. Anyone found smoking, drinking, cutting branches of trees have to plant trees to redeem themselves. For smoking, the burden is the planting and rearing of 25 trees; for drinking, 100 trees; for cutting branches, the burden depends on the extent of the damage. There are other forms of punishments as well such as repairing roads, building dykes, cleaning drains, depending on the nature of the offence.

As for trees, no one has dared to hack down any so far. So the punishment too remains undefined. "If a thing like that ever happens, the village will decide what should be done with the culprit," says Das.

Trees, indeed, are the most prized pos-

sessions of the villagers. They have transformed the very face of the village, says Kali Charan Jana, 76, a former leader of 75-strong dacoit gang that once struck terror in Midnapore. The view is shared by other ex-brigands such as Kedar Ghato, who now is a member of a group that protects the village's plantations, and Kali Rana, who lost one leg after he was caught while on a looting spree. He was almost lynched by an angry mob and left to die.

The dacoits of Sonakanian weren't always the outlaws they later turned out to be. Once upon a time, they formed the armed brigades of the local zamindars who raised them to keep ryots under subjugation and protect themselves against the marauding hordes of Maratha horsemen called the Bargis.

Following the abolition of the Zamin-

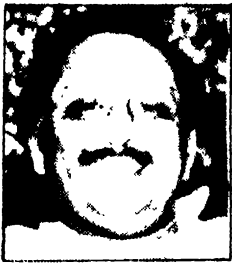
dari system after Independence, these militiamen fell into bad times. Jobless, they took to banditry as their means of survival. Initially, the gangs were large, consisting of as many as 75 members. With increasing police operations, the size of the groups became smaller.

With time, they seem to have come full circle. The former militiamen of the zamindars have today formed vigilante groups to protect trees, farmlands, plantations and their own village. They regularly take training in physical fitness, practise the martial arts, and are looked upon as protectors of nature and people where they were once despised as looters of property. •

Sk. Aminur Rahman/Sonakanian

India-Pakistan: whither

The Thaw in a time of war



Pak foreign minister Sartaj Aziz protests that his government has no control over the intruders. The Indian ministry of external affairs reacts furiously. How, the spokesman asks, can the Government of Pakistan disown responsibility for what has happened from their side of the Line of Control? Good question. But addressed, surely, to the wrong govern-

ment. For was it not the Government of India, in the person, first, of Raksha Mantri George Fernandes, and then through the glib tongue of the Prime Minister, the first to say that the Government of Pakistan did not know what its armed forces were up to? Was that not the purpose of external affairs minister Jaswant Singh personally presiding over the unveiling of the intelligence tapes passed on to us by the CIA? Everything, they thought, could be solved through a *jhappa* between the two Prime Ministers *a la* Lahore. To keep that option open, the Government of India found for the Government of Pakistan the very excuse that the Government of Pakistan now trots out — and the Government of India rejects! Is this any way of conducting diplomacy at its most delicate?

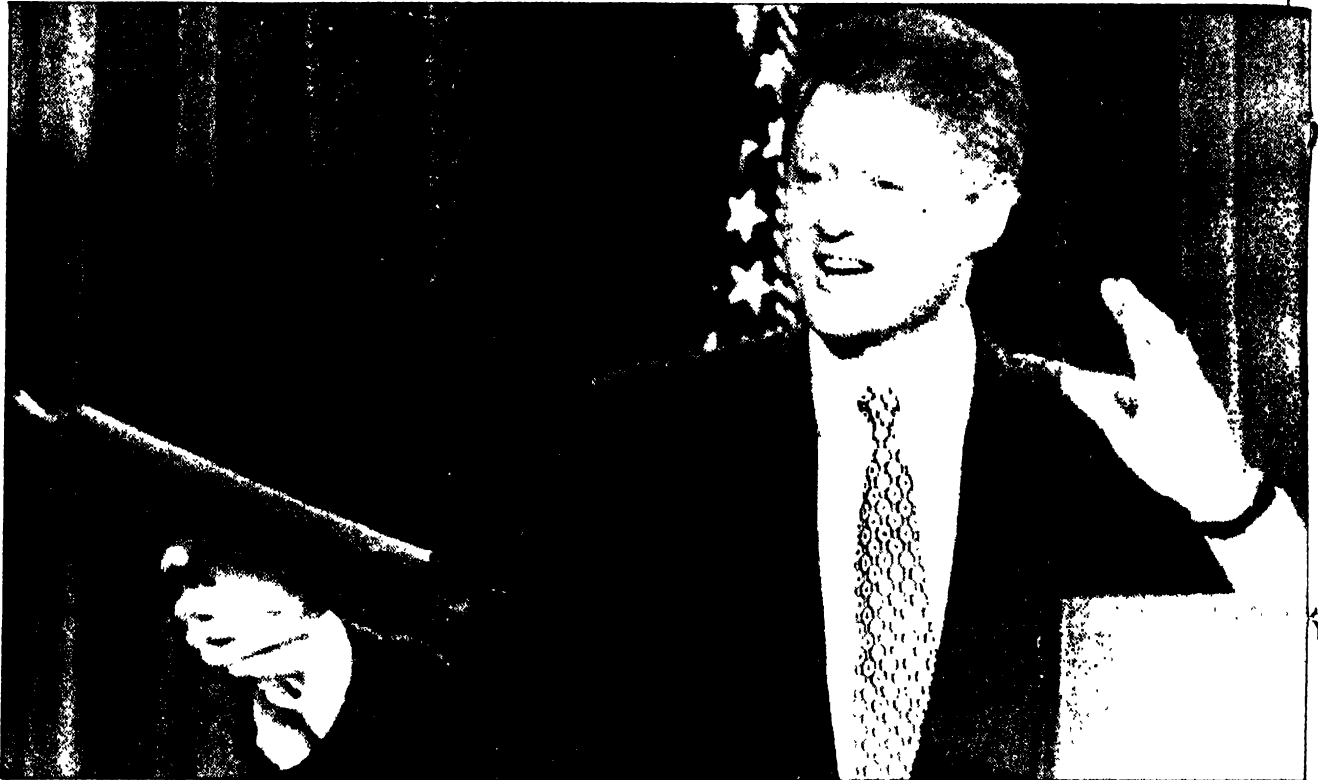
And now comes the pendulum swing on China. A year ago, the Government of India held that China was our "potential Enemy No. 1" and told President Clinton, in a letter deliberately made public, that the proximate cause of Pokhran-II was the Chinese nuclear threat. Targetting China was then justified by the Raksha Mantri in Parliament with copious readings from previous defence ministry reports about the dangers from China. Now, the external affairs minister fetches up in Beijing — a year too late, one might add — and startles even his hosts by announcing that, no, there is no security threat, absolutely none, from China. Then why did we make the Bomb? To enable Pakistan to bring theirs out of the basement? Consistency, logic, reason all take a back seat as the government plunges from one diplomatic fiasco to the next.

THEY ARE NOW SO taken up with Clinton and other interventionists pulling up Pakistan for having kicked off the present imbroglio that, throwing all caution to the winds, their emissaries are journeying the face of the earth



A.B. VAJPAYEE: It is difficult to blame him because his innocence of statecraft is the consequence of his having spent almost all the years of his half-century in politics in Opposition with no responsibility for carrying the consequences of his utterances

attempting to pick up endorsements. They have forgotten within a week what Kissinger said in Delhi just the other day: that if we seek American endorsement we will end with American intervention. The blatant American bombing of Baghdad last December and the massive violation of Yugoslavia's sovereignty in Kosovo — still going on — (both of which were protested by this same government) seem to have slipped their mind. Even British Prime Minister Tony Blair's reply to a question in the House of Commons saying that if India and Pakistan do not turn the heat down in Kargil, the international community will have to take cognisance of the threat to peace, has evoked not the slightest rejoinder from the government. Good chits from the Whites are good for elections, seems to be the line of the ruling coalition. So, hang the consequences and go beg G-8. The same G-8 that still has on its records the severest condemnation of India (and Pakistan) and whose joint sta-



BILL CLINTON: a year ago, the Government of India held that China was our "potential Enemy No.1" and told him that the proximate cause of Pokhran-II was the Chinese nuclear threat

tement last year led within days to the first-ever mention of Kashmir in any UN Security Council resolution since 1965, 34 years ago.

The government is playing ducks and drakes with our foreign policy for partisan electoral reasons. They have already caused us immense damage. The damage potential is greater now as it is a caretaker government responsible to no Parliament and capable of being halted only in September after the Lok Sabha results come in. Till then, it is only an alert Opposition that can keep the Government on its toes, in the hope and prayer that this will somehow keep in check its wilder excesses.

There is no advice which can be given to such an obtuse government that has the least hope of getting through. But what we have to guard against as a nation is letting our wholly justified anger against the Pakistanis get the better of our judgement of what is in the longer-term national interest. Pakistan cannot be wished away. It is a fact of both history and geography. The armed conquest of Pakistan is out of the question, especially now that we have paved the way to their getting the Bomb.

AIDING AND ABETTING THE disintegration of Pakistan is also out — mainly because Pakistan is not, whatever Najam Sethi might say, a failed or failing state, partly because Indian assistance to any secessionist movement is the best guarantee of the Pakistanis quashing it, and, most importantly, because Pakistani retaliation, especially with an Islamic Bomb as the final solution, rules out any but the



TONY BLAIR: the British PM's reply to a question in the House of Commons saying that if India and Pakistan do not turn the heat down in Kargil, the international community will have to take cognisance of the threat to peace, has evoked not the slightest rejoinder from the government

most clandestine and marginal assistance from India. It is going to be no easier to run our brand of Mujahideen in Pakistan than it has been for Pakistan to run their Mujahideen in J&K.

There remain two options. One is, armed hostility. The other is the rekindling of the abortive Thaw. What Atal Behari Vajpayee in his *naivete* did not realise was that the two options are not mutually exclusive but, indeed, mutually reinforcing. Armed hostility is the necessary condition of promoting the Thaw. It is difficult to blame Vajpayee because his innocence of statecraft is the consequence of his having spent almost all the years of his half-century in politics in Opposition with no responsibility for carrying the consequences of his utterances. So, he embraced Nawaz Sharif and simultaneously lowered his guard. He took no account of the reaction of Pakistani hawks to the dove-like cooing of the two Prime Ministers. His government did nothing to strengthen vigilance on the borders, especially on the Line of Control, when grabbing the opportunity for friendship that arose from Sharif's invitation to journey by bus.

If there was one lesson to be learned from the era of *Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai*, it was that when you make friends with a neighbour with whom you have disputes, the cause of peace is best served by readiness for war. The very fact that Atal Behari Vajpayee was among the leading spokesmen of the view that, in the period following the Panchsheel Pact, we neglected our defences in the pursuit of friendship, makes it all the more disturbing that 37 years later Vaj



GEORGE FERNANDES: his targetting China as "Enemy No. 1" was justified by him in Parliament with copious readings from previous defence ministry reports about the dangers from China



HENRY KISSINGER: the government seems to have forgotten within a week what the former US Secretary of State said in Delhi: that if we seek American endorsement we will end with American intervention

payee seems to have forgotten what he himself had been urging when he was a younger --- and, it seems, wiser --- man.

VAJPAYEE REPEATEDLY TROTS OUT the excuse that there had been no incursions across the northern salient of the Line of Control in the last 22 years. Surely that was all the more reason to redouble our vigilance in the Kargil sector, especially when the western passes had been effectively blocked. The Congress delegation that visited the Kargil sector was informed that as early as January shepherds were informing Indian intelligence of unusual happenings on the Line of Control. The 1999 equivalent of the Henderson-Brookes report will doubtless confirm what is being repeatedly alleged by sober sources with intelligence and army expertise --- that certainly by April, on the eve of the snows melting, lots of information was coming the defence ministry's way to indicate that all was far from well on the Line of Control. Bemused by their wretched bus-ride, the government preferred to keep their collective eyes closed. Buslomacy, they believed, would get them more political mileage than telling the truth even to themselves. Thousands of lives are being lost to retrieve what a moment's alertness could have saved. For all we needed to do was move our troops out first to man our bunkers and *sangers* before the Pakistanis got in. This elementary precaution we failed to take. Which is why young men in their hundreds are falling martyr in the worst India-Pakistan military engagement in a generation.

Driving out the intruder is the first national priority. But restoring the diplomatic dialogue to an even keel must be the first diplomatic priority of the next government. We can either solve our bilateral problems between ourselves --- or let others in to solve these for us. Letting problems fester, as we have let done since Shimla, might once have had its strange logic. The imperative now is to thrash out the problems, on the negotiating table, through uninterrupted and interruptable talks. It is the only government capable of performing these twin tasks that the nation should elect come September. •



JAI JAWAN: Indian soldiers in action in Dras sector

Guns of Kargil

The battle at the LoC reaches a crucial stage

In the course of one day last week, Pakistan lost three battles: the G-8 in Cologne, the World Cup at Lords and the Tololing Ridge in Dras. The grinding slog in the Kargil ranges for one hillmanship is scaling new heights. As in a game of chess, both sides are jockeying for positions hill by treacherous hill. For the attacker, the eviction of intrusions has developed into a sound strategy — soften/suppress, surround and strike. Mountaineering skills are proving more decisive than pure battlecraft.

The intruders will avoid falling into the 9-trap, ensuring their replenishment and withdrawal routes are kept open. Thirty days after the clearance of the Tololing Ridge, the Kargil battle has reached a crucial stage both militarily and politically. The military route to restoring the LoC is looking more arduous, costly and long.

Pakistani intrusions are being addressed sector by sector in the priority of threat and danger each poses to Kargil. Dras is clearly the most vital ground where the battle for Tiger Hill and other hill features in the rear will go on. Pakistani soldiers are giving a tough fight as these heights dominate the road and the camping ground in Dras which is the headquarters of the brigade fighting this battle. Clearance of these heights will remove the immediate threat to the Leh road. The Tololing threat has been eliminated but Tiger Hill is still there. Tiger Hill and Tololing are to Dras what Point 13620 is to Kargil.

The air force has shifted the weight of the strikes to posts and camps in the rear



rather than targetting the mountain tops for two reasons: better hit probability and a minimal chance of striking own troops closing in to the objectives.

Mashkoh and Kaksar intrusions have been contained and will be rolled back once Dras heights are captured. These are less important. Although Batalik

BOOM! BOOM! Bofors firing at the posts occupied by intruders

does not pose any threat to Kargil, it does open the route to Siachen base via Chorbatala and Turtuk. Therefore, Batalik after Dras is the next sensitive area.

Both sides have taken additional defensive measures along the rest of the LoC and the international border. Artillery duels and small arms firing have been confined to the LoC.

In Pakistan, Gen. Parvez Musharraf's military master-stroke cornering the Indian Army has become the cause for celebration. Some Pakistanis are saying the government has failed to exploit the extraordinary military gains politically and diplomatically. The army's Kargil show has also sent alarm bells ringing about the possibility of a military takeover.

The Islamic fundamentalists with whom Musharraf has long-standing links and the Islamic officer corps are pleased as punch at the outcome of this deft incision of the LoC. It is officers of this ilk and religious fundamentalists



WAR-STRUCK: A desolate village in Dras



Thirty days after the clearance of the Tololing Ridge, the Kargil battle has reached a crucial stage both militarily and politically. The military route to restoring the LoC is looking more arduous, costly and long

rect demarche of the G-8 from Cologne that the LoC has been violated and its sanctity be restored immediately, makes Musharraf's plan look silly. The Americans are particularly unhappy with the Pakistan Army for creating fresh tensions in J&K. Gen Shulton, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff, was horrified seeing photographs of mutilated bodies of Indian soldiers.

The telephone intercepts — an Indian intelligence coup — of 26 and 29 May between Parvez Musharraf and his Chief of General Staff, Lt Gen. Aziz — are clinching proof of the army's decisive hand in the intrusions. There were two other intercepts between the same dates in which there is more evidence to nail the army's participation in the intrusions.

who had led and encouraged the failed invasions of J&K of 1947 and 1965. Repeating a tired strategy they are only reinforcing defeat.

This time around, Musharraf's operational brilliance cannot, unfortunately be hailed openly as this would contradict the official position that the intru-

sions are the handiwork of the Mujahideen from Indian-occupied Kashmir. Musharraf cannot eat the cake and have it too.

Entrenched on heights Pakistani regulars supported by Taliban are militarily not as isolated as the country has been diplomatically marginalised. The indi-

THE TOLOLING TECHNIQUE

How to fight the mountains

The capture of Tololing heights on 21 June culminating in the battle for point 5140 is just the beginning of the long haul. Its capitulation has taken three weeks of gallant fighting and nearly 100 casualties. The elimination of this segment of the intrusion removes in part, the observed domination and interdiction of the Leh highway. Tiger Hill, the key to rolling back the most dangerous of the four pockets of intrusion, is still holding out. It will be the next target in Dras.

The enemy can still observe some movement on the road from Kaksar and Tiger Hill which means artillery fire can be brought on the road as targets are already registered. No direct observation is required for this, but the Tololing thorn has been taken out for a relatively low price when compared with similar battles at OP Hill in Rajouri sector in 1965 or eviction of other intrusions across the LoC. The reason is: now there is no pressure of time on troops. Neither the government nor the chief of army staff has imposed on field commanders any time stipulation for the eviction of intrusions and restoration of LoC.

The battle of Tololing Ridge is a classic re-enactment of first securing a toe-hold on the ridge before attempting the pinnacle. The toe-hold becomes a foothold, gets firmed in and creeps towards Point 5140. This initial operation of seizing a lodgement is known as the firm base for the main assault. This task was achieved by 13 J&K Rif.

The enemy immediately brought down salvo after salvo of mortar and artillery fire as the Tololing ridge had been registered earlier as an SOS target. Had the enemy not been forced to withdraw from the ridge but completely surrounded, the defender would have asked for Red-over-Red-over-Red fire on its own position. Whether in or out of the ridge, Tololing had to be plastered. That is one reason why 13 J&K Rif. suffered heavy casualties



Siachen: a challenge for the Indian troops

taking Tololing.

Point 5140 on the other hand, was captured with relatively few casualties. It was attacked from three directions: along Tololing ridge and from the north and west of it along extremely difficult and precipitous approaches. These attacks were launched by night allowing maximum time to posture the assault with stealth and cunning. Because troops were so close to the objective, and it was dark, neither air strikes nor mortar and artillery fire could be employed. It was a bayonet assault, from one rock face to another, one ledge to the other, scampering to the top. When the enemy realised it was being encircled by two other battalions — 18 Garhwal Rifles and 1 Naga — discretion became the better part of valour.

In the rarified atmosphere and minus 10 degrees centigrade, wind speeds of 30 to 40 kms and a wind-chill factor, the Naga-Garhwali and Kashmiri soldiers would have required the

skills of Santosh Yadav and Tenzing Norgay to rappel to the top. And once on top, to stay there. When tired and breathless soldiers reach the objective this phase of battle is the most crucial. Most battles have been lost before they are won, by the immediate counterattack of the enemy.

Some times, the enemy employs a ruse; deliberately vacating the top, instead, they form up on the reverse slopes to pounce on the unsuspecting attacker the moment he reaches the top. The Tololing battle has shown the experience, wisdom and valour of Indian soldiers.

Once our troops are also on equivalent heights, they have a distinct advantage. Further, soldiers can be recycled easily with fresh ones, something the enemy cannot easily do. In Siachen, where 15 soldiers are occupying a post, another 25 are held in reserve below the post. Bana top, the highest 21,000 feet post in Siachen, which India wrested from Pakistan in 1987

AMIN WAR

can take a maximum of 9 soldiers. For the last 12 years, Pakistan has launched dozens of assaults but failed to recapture Bana. The sheer difficulty of scaling the post makes the attempt a non-starter. The only



hope of capturing these posts is if sentries there are asleep.

No wonder Benazir Bhutto used to first bait Gen. Zia-ul-Haq and later Nawaz Sharif for losing Siachen and taunt them with the gift of *burqas*.

The Batalik intrusions though contained, are dangerous because these can turn the southern flank of Siachen through Turtuk. Tiger Hill and Batalik heights are next to come under the hammer. There is absolutely no need to press the stopwatch button. After the diplomatic beating of Pakistan in Cologne, time is on India's side in Kargil.

There is no question of Siachenisation of these intrusions which are across the LoC. Siachen on the other hand, is a compact defensive layout but in no man's land. The cost for Pakistan maintaining these posts in penny packets between Indian defences in Kargil will be horrendous. Once intrusions are vacated India can close the gaps at a much smaller cost. ■



WILL THE PEACE RETURN?: Village women outside their house at Kargil

Pakistan is left with few useful options. These are retaining at all costs, the intrusions till the onset of winter (closure of Zojila Pass) early November, opening a new front in J&K to relieve pressure in Kargil and withdraw unilaterally, or under external pressure. India on the other hand, has no choice except to continue with the evictions, vacating the aggression.

Contrary to a surfeit of strategic advice to cross the LoC, India at present should not do so. But the option must be kept open. It will be wrong to keep saying as the US-led Nato forces were saying in Kosovo, that ground troops would not be used, that India would not cross the LoC. It has already stated that any military target across LoC interfering in its military operations will be engaged.

Much political and diplomatic mileage has been gained by the show of restraint, confirming India's sobriety and sense of responsibility in the face of aggression. One other factor militating against the military option is the fact that the Pakistan military has taken up defensive positions along the LoC.

India is occupying high moral ground though in Kargil it is Pakistan who is

holding dominating heights. India should therefore, exploit the enemy's weak political and diplomatic flank by isolating it further than what the G-8 has done. Pakistan's economy is in dire straits with an overall debt burden of \$ 40 billion, a bad debt of 3.3 billion with a foreign exchange reserve of a mere 1 billion. India needs to launch aggressive economic diplomacy to get the international financial institutions to apply the monetary squeeze on Pakistan.

US support for the Indian case is unprecedented but not openly stated. US officials are reportedly helping Pakistan to seek a face-saving formula to vacate the intrusions. After the row on safe passage and safe conduct, it is now time for a face-saving extrication device.

The question is: why a face-saving if Pakistan insists it is not responsible for the Kargil situation? The face-saving in fact will follow the vacation of aggression. India will be willing to pick up the threads of bilateral talks including the issue of Kashmir. India will seek from Pakistan guarantees that the LoC will not be violated again and that Pakistan will not support the spread of Islamic fundamentalism in the region. ■

Maj. Gen. Ashok K. Mehta/New Delhi

The master blasters

The Kargil conflict has unmasked a new face of militancy in Jammu and Kashmir

The Kargil conflict and the subsequent militant actions in the Valley have unmasked a new face of militancy in Jammu and Kashmir. For the past decade, it used to be a guerrilla 'hit-and-run' affair. The militants never tried to occupy areas and operate from there. Now for the first time militants have taken over a particular region of strategic importance and launched an offensive. IEDs are being excessively used in the Valley's plain areas since the mountainous ridges of Kargil witnessed the flare-up. This, indeed, is identical to the method Afghans used in their fight against Russian troops in the 1980s.

"Yes. It is a strategical change on the part of militants," concurs Mohammad Azam Inqalabi, a former militant leader and a senior secessionist ideologue. Azam's contention is that the militants changed tack as they felt they could not fight Indian security forces on the streets. Street-battles between militants and security forces had cost the civilian population dearly. "In such fights only civilians would get killed," said Mohammad Iqbal, an engineering student, corroborating Inqalabi's statement.

Agrees Prof. Abdul Gani Butt, chief spokesman of All Party Hurriyat Conference, an alliance of over a dozen separatist political and religious outfits, "The dynamics of militancy have changed. And Kargil is the outcome of that change." Earlier, militant mobs could be spotted everywhere in the Valley and there would be daily encounters between militants and security forces. Throwing of grenades was very common, and in most cases, it would be a civilian who got injured. "That phase is

over," adds Gani. "The mass militancy has yielded place to a motivated and disciplined militancy," he insists, "and Kargil is its manifestation."

"There should be some supreme militant mind behind Kargil conflict," elaborates Azam. "They [militants] can now use it [Kargil] as their operational base," he says. Azam, the first Kashmiri militant leader to have joined Afghan Mujahideen to fight Russians, maintains that if militants succeeded in establishing control on Kargil mountains, it could turn out to be another Panjshir Valley. "And whoever tries to enter it will vanish," he adds. Panjshir has been a strong base of senior Afghan commander Ahmad Shah Masood. The valley is so suited for guerrilla operations that Russians, and even Taliban who control more than 90 per cent of Afghanistan, failed to conquer it.

Syed Salahuddin, the chief commander of Hizbul Mujahideen, the strongest

militant organisation operating in the state corroborated these conjectures when he spoke to a foreign weekly magazine on 14 June. "The change in our policy from hit-and-run to area occupation occurred a year before," he said. According to the Hizb chief, he prepared his men for over a year to move into mountain areas around Kargil. In winter, the infiltration began in small batches, with recruits from other groups as well. "It has been the most successful operation in the history of Kashmiri struggle," Salahuddin told the magazine.

After six weeks of flushing out operations, it's still uncertain how much longer it would take to clear the area. Meanwhile, the militants in the plains of the Valley have stepped up their activities. A remarkable feature of their activity is the excessive use of landmines to hit the targets. Ever since the Kargil conflict broke out, militants in the Valley

Women at Latsur village, 45 km from Kargil





An army base at Kargil

caused more than a dozen IED explosions, killing 18 security personnel and wounding more than two dozen.

Two IED explosions took place on Srinagar-Kargil Highway, which is under strict round-the-clock vigil by the security forces. Military convoys move on the road regularly in the wake of the Kargil conflict. At least 11 army jawans including some officers were killed and 18 others wounded. Militants first struck on 8 June when they set off an IED at Wangat-Ganderbal Road. An army vehicle was blown up into pieces.

Digging a bunker



Six army men were killed instantly and six others seriously injured.

Two IEDs were exploded on 18 June at Kijipara near Kangan on the Srinagar-Kargil Highway, killing five army men and wounding ten. The army immediately sealed off the area and launched a massive search and combing operation but

ABDUL GHANI LONE



"The militants who have crossed over to this side of the LoC did not commit any offence"

there was no trace of militants responsible for the subversive act. The police and intelligence sources believe that the forest covering higher reaches of Kangan is full of militants and suspect that the explosions might have been caused by them.

For some time now, militants have been avoiding direct confrontation with the security forces and have been making use of IEDs to eliminate them. But the use of IEDs shot up remarkably since Kargil.

On May 28 and 30, militants blasted two army and ITBP vehicles on the Srinagar-Jammu Highway, killing eight personnel and their relatives. At least 18 others were injured. Two army men were killed in a separate incident on 11 June at Patushahi in the frontier district of Kupwara in the same fashion. Six security personnel were wounded in another IED blast at Pahalgam Road in south Kashmir on 5 June. Militants also detonated an IED at Bindi-Jamla Road in Rajouri on 25 May, blowing up a BSF vehicle. Two BSF jawans were killed in the incident.

Security and police authorities agree that the militants are now desisting from coming face to face with the security forces. "The use of IEDs by them [militants] is their changed strategy," said one police officer. "They are now less in number and cannot afford a large number of casualties by facing security forces directly," elaborated another officer. Besides, by using IEDs, militants are able to inflict more losses on the security forces.

Significantly, the All Party Hurriyat Conference has gone public in registering their sympathy with militants occupying positions in Kargil. Abdul Ghani Lone, a senior Hurriyat leader, says that the Line of Control (LoC) was not acceptable to the people of Kashmir and the militants who have crossed over to this side of the LoC did not commit any offence.

Keen observers and senior political analysts view this new militant scenario as a 'trailblazing' phase of militancy. It has, they feel, not only belied the government claim that the era of militancy was over but has come as a serious poser to the security forces combating militants. The senior police and security officers have no reservation in admitting that the militancy has re-emerged in a new frame. "It is a dangerous phase," concludes a police officer. •

Rashid Ahmad/Srinagar

The jawans of the Bihar Regiment lay down their lives in Kargil

What had started as a skirmish, has now culminated in a full-scale confrontation with infiltrators of the Pakistani Army and the Mujahideen backed by it in the Kargil sector of Jammu and Kashmir. But the Bihar Regiment's First Battalion has chosen to tread where angels fear to go.

Trained by the Bihar Regiment Centre (BRC) at Danapur near Patna, the *jawans* of four battalions of the Bihar Regiment are right now engrossed in an intense hand-to-hand combat with the intruders as well as regular troops in the Batalik, Dras and Kargil sectors.

It is aptly said that the Bihar Regiment embodies all that is best in the Indian infantry and stands second to none in the modern army. The history of the regiment dates back to the time of Chandragupta Maurya. Ironically, while other regiments of the Indian Army trace their origins from the days of the East India Company, the Bihar Regiment was forgotten.

In 1752, the governorship of Bihar fell to Siraj-ud Daula. It was during his regime that a number of Bihar battalions were raised by the British. The battalions were required to serve in the Bengal Army of the East India Company as well as Mir Kasim, the then Viceroy of Bihar.

It was after the Battle of Plassey in June 1757, Colonel Robert Clive, who later became a Lord, emerged as the master of Bengal. The following year, Clive came to Patna on a business trip. He had come to procure the monopoly in the saltpetre trade.

During his visit to Bihar, Clive started the groundwork to raise the Third Battalion of the Bengal Native Infantry. Though the First and the Second Battalions were of non-Biharis, Clive was in a mind to recruit Biharis from Bhojpur district.

Raised as the Third Battalion of the Bengal Native Infantry, it was referred to as "Captain Turner's battalion" for he was its first commanding officer. And to make up for the heavy losses after fighting against Mir Kasim's army, soldiers from the Third Battalion were

Roll of honour



On 29 May, Major Mariappan Saravanan and his men came face to face with the infiltrators on Point 4268. He died along with ten *jawans*, but not before he brought down four from the other side

sent to the First and Second Battalions.

By 1825, the number of all-Bihar battalions that were raised shot up to 18. But in 1857, after the Sepoy Mutiny led by Mangal Pandey, the course of the Bihar Regiment changed. The Bengal Army was reorganised and the British stopped recruiting Biharis altogether.

Only when the British were in need of more recruits for the Indian Army, during the Second World War, the First Battalion of the Bihar Regiment was raised on 15 September, 1940, at Jamshedpur by Lt.-Col. J.R.H. Tweed, though its parent units were the 11/19 Hyderabad Regiments. The three-headed lions on the Ashoka Pillar was adopted as the cap badge and "*Bajrang Bali ki jai*" chosen as the war cry.

Following this, on 1 November, 1945, Lt.-Col. R.C. Muller raised the Bihar Regiment Centre at Agra. The next year, the centre moved to Ranchi in south Bihar. In the same year, it again shifted to Gaya in central Bihar. After Independence, the first Indian commandant, Lt.-Col. (later Brigadier) H.S. Randhawa, took over and in 1949, the centre finally moved to Danapur.

Today, the BRC has 18 battalions and one territorial army battalion. Besides, two Rashtriya Rifles Battalions (4 & 24) were raised to counter the insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir.

Talking to SUNDAY, a senior officer of the BRC stated that four battalions of the Bihar Regiment had also been active participants in the Indian Peace-Keeping Force despatched to Sri Lanka in 1988-89. The IPKF was pulled out in 1990.

In the past, battalions of the Bihar Regiment have had convincing victories at home including those at Buxar, Carnatic and Maratha wars. Across the seas, the regiment has time and again proved to be the best at Malaya, Sumatra, Egypt, Sri Lanka and Somalia (as the Indian unit of the UN peacekeeping force).

Interestingly, the First Battalion of the Bihar Regiment has also fought the Japanese forces. Being a part of the famous Lushai Brigade, 1 Bihar had moved to Burma and brought battle honours after having fought the Haka and Gangaw battles in 1945.

If the 10th Regiment earned the Theatre Honour for brave performance in the battle of Akhaura during the Indo-Pak war in 1971, then back at home the 3rd and the 8th Battalions were referred to as "Ulfa busters", after having control-

led insurgency in the north-east.

The BRC boasts of an excellent track record. The Eighth Battalion earned the Chief of Army staff (COAS) unit citation for its performance in Manipur in 1998. The 10th and the 14th Battalions got the same for their role in Operation Rakshak in J&K and Punjab, respectively.

On the whole, military honours have not been an exception with the Bihar

A long intense gun battle commenced as the major and his group were drawn into a hand-to-hand combat. Saravanan died, along with ten *jawans*, but not before he brought down four from the other side.

Similar has been the case with Lance Naik Vidyanand Singh, Naik Shatrughan Singh, Sepoys Arvind Kumar Pandey, Haridev Prasad and Ganesh Yadav. They were all killed during Operation Vijay.

SANJAY KUMAR



Bihar chief minister Rabri Devi handed over a cheque of Rs 10 lakh to the bereaved families. She also gave Rs 21 lakh to the War Widows Rehabilitation Centre at Danapur

Regiment. With two Ashok Chakras, eight Kirti Chakras, nine Vir Chakras and as many as 33 Shaurya Chakras and 35 Sena Medals, the regiment is held in very high esteem. A large number of PVSM, VSM and AVSM have also gone to the various battalions of the Bihar Regiment.

And along with the honours, martyrdom came, too. It was on 29 May. Jubbar ridge stands at 14,000 feet in the Batalik sector and the First Battalion of the Bihar Regiment was out to make history.

Major Mariappan Saravanan, leading a group of 30 brave men, came face to face with the infiltrators on Point 4268.

Standing by the regiment, Bihar chief minister Rabri Devi, too, did what she could. She handed over a cheque of Rs 10 lakh to the families of the major and the *jawans* killed in Kargil. She further promised a government job for one member of each family and a plot of land in the place of their choice in the state. Honouring the supreme sacrifices of the Bihar Regiment, Rabri Devi also handed over Rs 21 lakh to the War Widows Rehabilitation Centre at Danapur.

As the operations in Kargil continue, the BRC continues to train *jawans* and send them to the frontier. And the *jawans* are too ready to go, not thinking of whether they will come back or not. •

Naved Zahir/Danapur

Advantage Jayalalitha

The AIADMK chief's exoneration from the coal import case gives a new dimension to Tamil Nadu politics

Last week, the AIADMK supremo Jayalalitha got a small reprieve when she was discharged from the multi-crore coal import case by the special court set up by the Karunanidhi government. The special judge held that there was nothing to connect Jayalalitha and the then finance minister V.R. Nedunchezian, with criminal conspiracy in the case.

Ever since the state government set up three special courts in 1997 and transferred 46 corruption cases involving Jayalalitha and others to these courts, she was in a bind. Since then, Jayalalitha had only one point agenda: to wriggle out of the cases by using her "political clout".

To a certain extent, on the strength of her 18 MPs, Jayalalitha was able to make the BJP government dance to her tunes. Last February the BJP transferred hostile judges and also tried to water down the cases against her, when Jayalalitha began to make noises and started cosyng up to the Congress. Immediately, five central notifications were issued relocating the 46 cases to the district courts, which seemed to suggest they would be delayed interminably.

But after the BJP government lost by one vote in the Lok Sabha, the knives were out for Jayalalitha and things also started moving fast in the courts; with the BJP moving closer to the DMK, the pressure on Jayalalitha was increased. Subsequently, when the Supreme Court upheld the state government's right to appoint special judges, Jayalalitha was in trouble. She adopted delaying tactics



Jayalalitha: political fortunes are looking up?

like malingering 'viral fever' just when she was to appear at the special court on 25 May in the Tamil Nadu Small Industries (TANSI) land deal case.

In the TANSI land case, Jayalalitha had purchased land and building on a three-acre site belonging to TANSI, far below the approved government rate.

This is considered to be a tight case for her since a public servant can neither buy nor sell government land.

With the TANSI land deal case, charges have been framed in four other cases involving Jayalalitha. They are: the colour TV scam case, Pleasant Stay Hotel, Kodaikamal case and disproportionate wealth case. Trial has begun in all these cases and witnesses are being examined. As it appears, it will be very difficult for Jayalalitha to wriggle out of

these cases which are supposed to be over within three months.

The BJP and the DMK want the judgement out before the Lok Sabha elections in September. They want Jayalalitha to be debarred from contesting elections, which may be possible if she is found to be guilty in these cases.

So when Jayalalitha was discharged from the coal import case, it was like manna from heaven for the AIADMK chief. In his 35-page order, Judge Radhakrishnan observed: "Since the prosecution had not placed any material or substantiated its case that Jayalalitha and Nedunchezian approved the (coal import) proposal with the knowledge of the objections raised by the PWD secretary Sundaram, I am to hold that the charges against them are groundless and they should be discharged under section

trusted ally of the CPI(M) general secretary Harkishen Singh Surjeet.

This development has come as a shock to Karunanidhi, who till recently stood firmly behind the Left. As a DMK MLA observed: "The Left has sought to sweep under the carpet the issue of corruption and is seeking to justify an alliance with a party like the AIADMK whose top leadership is enmeshed in corruption cases."

However, the Tamil Nadu CPI(M) leader, N. Sankariah, tried to play down the negative impact. According to Sankariah, "The CPI(M) does consider corruption to be an issue but the fundamen-

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Harkishen Singh
Surjeet**

tha made it very clear that there won't be any MGR kind of formula of sharing seats (when MGR was chief minister he had worked out a deal with Congress in which he contested two-third seats in state Assembly elections and one-third seats were left for the Congress. And for the Lok Sabha this was reversed with Congress getting two-third of the 39 seats in Tamil Nadu).

This time, Jayalalitha is offering only 6 to 8 seats to the Congress, while the majority of the 39 seats in Tamil Nadu would be contested by the AIADMK (about 24 seats) and the rest 15 have to be shared by the Left, Congress, Janata Dal, Muslim League and Puthiya Tamizhagam.

Meanwhile, the Puthiya Tamizhagam leader, whose *bete noire* was Jayalalitha all these years, quietly flew down to Tri-



M. Karunanidhi: disturbed by the court verdict

vandrum to meet A.K. Antony to reach an electoral understanding in the AIADMK-led front. But this time, it is not the Congress, but the CPI(M) which will call the shots over the distribution of seats in Tamil Nadu in the AIADMK-led front. Because H.S. Surjeet has now replaced Subramanian Swamy as Jayalalitha's favourite adviser.

The state government, in the meantime, has filed in Madras High Court a criminal revision petition seeking to set aside order of the special court discharging Jayalalitha and Nedunchezian in the "coal import" case. And even as Jayalalitha's political fortunes are beginning to look up, the DMK is gearing up to take on her and the Left parties. •

Sreedhar Pillai/Madras



Harkishen Singh Surjeet: considers Jayalalitha as a trusted ally

CrPC 239. In fact, there is nothing to connect them with the criminal conspiracy."

As her partymen started distributing sweets in the court, loyal advocates began to chant "long live the *puratchi thalaivi* (revolutionary leader). Meanwhile, a beaming Jayalalitha told the press: "I have been vindicated. This is only the beginning. The situation is changing now." It is very obvious, she added, when asked whether she thought that the cases against her were vindictive and were being expedited by the DMK.

Politically, her exoneration from the coal import case has boosted her sagging political image. Today, the CPI and CPI(M) are closely coordinating with her to launch a "broad secular front". In fact, Jayalalitha has suddenly become a

tal question before the people in the 1999 Lok Sabha polls would be communalism."

The Left leaders are waxing eloquent about Jayalalitha and they have been quick to debunk the concept of a third front in Tamil Nadu — an idea mooted by TMC chief G.K. Moopanar. The message is loud and clear: "All those who want the BJP defeated should accept the AIADMK as an ally".

This is exactly what Jayalalitha would have wanted. A few days earlier Congress emissaries A.K. Antony and Manmohan Singh met her and discussed future poll alliances. However, Jayalali-

Despite Pakistan's loss to Australia, the Asians made up for it both on and off the field

Several hundred crores of rupees went into making the seventh World Cup cricket competition a resounding commercial success. But, while many outfits, including the International Cricket Council, will be laughing all the way to the bank, one of the effects of this media blitzkrieg may have scarred the game forever.

While national loyalties have led to violence — even, in one case, a war — in some sports like soccer, cricket had remained a relaxed pastime for its spectators. This was especially true in countries like Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and, of course, in the country of its origin, Britain.

Not any more. The 1999 World Cup saw unprecedented enthusiasm in

Players of several countries complained about this "invasion" and Steve Waugh of Australia even predicted serious injury to those who were thus besieged. One must say the British were lucky they didn't have to cope with any major incident.

The on-field antics, unfortunately, have now been imbibed by the Pakistani supporters living in England. In areas like Wembley and Southall, carloads of Pakistanis targeted Indian homes and establishments with both abuse and religious slogans. This outburst came after the country's victory over New Zealand in the semi-finals, but was prompted by the defeat inflicted by India.

It is a different matter that Pakistani sport took a severe bashing on Sunday. While at Lord's there was humiliation

Behind the wicket

England's cricket grounds which, considering the lukewarm response it normally elicits, was good for the game. Unfortunately, the spectators were mostly Asians. And worse, they were visitors from the continent.

This large horde brought with it the typical hyper-emotional outbursts that have characterised matches in the sub-continent and threatened or actually disrupted some of them. Asians settled in England had, until this World Cup, taken defeat in their stride, in keeping with the English tradition. But the rotten-egg syndrome finally seemed to have overtaken this fun-loving segment.

In match after match, people swarmed into the playing arena, sometimes even before the match was over. Initially, the intention was to merely get close to or touch their heroes. Then, it became a quest for souvenirs like wickets. Unfortunately, the middle stump with its camera and sound equipment was not merely a souvenir — it cost a pocket.

over a record low score of 132 and an eventual eight-wicket loss in what turned out to be a 60-over match (initially, each team played 60 overs in a limited-overs contest), over in Brisbane there was further calamity with Pakistan being ousted from the elite six for the Champions Trophy in hockey for the first time in its 21-year history.

To rub it in, perhaps, was Australia. The hockey hosts won both the men's and the women's competitions and, in cricket, became only the second country after the West Indies to win the World Cup twice. The twin triumphs have put them firmly among the top sporting nations of the world and this, despite their failure to qualify for soccer's World Cup final rounds last year.

The World Cup cricket fiesta returned to England 16 years after India's triumph there. Expected to work wonders with England's youngsters — who have been deserting the game in large numbers — this tournament failed to garner



'home' support. To make matters worse, England failed to get past the preliminary round, prompting several diehard fans to make a 'killing' by offering their tickets — obviously at a huge premium — to Asians eager to see their teams in action. In any case, a large number of them were too involved in Manchester United's unprecedented soccer triple crown to take interest in cricket.

Pakistani fans were the worst sufferers. In England, a lot of them paid heavily for the 'privilege' of watching a disaster unfold before their eyes. Back home, hectic preparations had been made for the final, including laudatory songs prior to the match and stacks of fireworks to be lit after it. Unfortunately, the estimated three million viewers on both domestic and foreign television channels were not prepared for the defeat.

It was a different story for the South Africans. Carrying the label of favourites up to the semi-finals may have, in



the day England bowed out of the competition!

Despite India's lacklustre performance, heads are unlikely to roll. Captain Mohammad Azharuddin could have redeemed his image had he volunteered his retirement from the game. It would have given his mentor Raj Singh Dungarpur just the lever he needed to keep Azhar at the helm for a few series more.

Instead, the skipper made statements like he was batting wonderfully at the nets and that there was nothing wrong with his game. He said this at a time when he was playing poorly and not scoring runs. He was aided by coach Anshuman Gaekwad, who found no fault with the Indian team or individual members even when India crashed out of matches it looked set to win.

The debate in India will now rage over the future of the reflex-shorn middle-order batsman whose only success — even as captain — was the match with Pakistan. Azhar's batting over the past year and his captaincy have come in for severe criticism — especially from former cricketers. It will be difficult for the selectors to persist with him unless, of course, the BCCI president makes known his preference — which he did, much to the country's misfortune — before the World Cup.

And Gaekwad's tenure should be even more brief. The man whose pro-

the end, weighed too heavily on them. But, despite Herschelle Gibbs' gaffe with the Steve Waugh catch which gave Australia a berth in the semi-finals and the goof-up by Lance Klusener and Allan Donald which cost them a place in the finals, the Springboks were accorded a heroes' welcome back home. They had played well and lost.

Not so, India. The massive hype which advertising agencies, eager to be one up on the Joneses, engineered through their clients was not something the Indians were capable of sustaining. India, indeed, ended its campaign with a whimper, hoping against hope that Zimbabwe and Australia would do it a favour.

However, India did make an impression with some individual performances. Rahul Dravid was the pick of the lot with the highest individual total. Despite India departing after the Super Six, Dravid had a tally of 461 runs, 63 more

than Steve Waugh who played two more matches. And Sourav Ganguly not only was the highest scorer in this World Cup — 183, in aggregate, he was just behind Waugh. India also now holds the highest partnership record of 318 for any wicket in one-day cricket, not just the World Cup.

But thrashing Kenya, or a rudderless England, was not enough to warrant the sky-high expectations whipped up by the admen. Perhaps, they were better suited to lift England's spirits in a situation where even the theme song for the World Cup 'arrived' in music shops on

Australia's performance in the final was stupendous. It passed Pakistan's total of 132 in just 20.1 overs. In the process it helped re-ignite the betting issue in Pakistan

nouncements have centred almost solely on defending the captain and who tried hard to offset the influence of Bobby Simpson, has nothing to show in his tenure. At least Simpson's efforts have been reflected to some extent on the players' agility, running between the wickets and fielding — which is three aspects more than Gaekwad's efforts. Cricket lovers will hope that Simpson is allowed to take over completely from Gaekwad, so that ineptitude and inefficiency are minimised and, a degree of professionalism injected. It was sorely lacking during the World Cup.

But there will be happier memories for the rookies. Players from Scotland and, particularly, Bangladesh, will cherish memories of a competition they had entered for the first time. Bangladesh will be very happy with its performance, the highlight of which was its victory over Pakistan. It was a merited win and showed that the difference in the standard of cricketing nations is gradually narrowing.

For Sri Lanka, however, it was a forgettable sojourn. They came in as champions and left with nothing to show other than an ageing bunch of players with neither mental strength nor aptitude. It was a poor display by a majority of players who were part of the 1996 victorious squad. While age may have been a factor, one cannot ignore the effects of infighting in the Sri Lankan board. The people involved have political clout and the issue is now in court.

Another disappointment was the West Indies outfit with an array of stars who simply refuse to fade away — Courtney Walsh and Curtly Ambrose being the leading lights. They were expected to reach the quarter-finals at least. Despite sporadic efforts by the two pacemen, captain Brian Lara and Shivnarine Chanderpaul, the team as a whole didn't click. The lacklustre effort may have set back by several years the move to popularise cricket further.

But one offshoot of the championship is likely to move in an entirely different direction. Had Pakistan won the cup, there would have been bouquets all the way. Even a hard-fought final may have



Had Pakistan won the cup, there would have been bouquets all the way. Even a hard-fought final may have provided fans solace in defeat. But the Akram-led team caved in without resistance

provided cricket fans solace in defeat. The Akram-led team, however, caved in against Australia without even token resistance.

It recorded the lowest-ever total in a World Cup final, scoring less than the 140 which an overconfident West Indies managed against the victorious Indians in 1983. And then the bowling by the vaunted Wasim Akram and Shoaib Akhtar was torn to shreds by Australians keen on proving that Steve Waugh was

their cricketing prophet: when South Africa's Gibbs dropped a simple catch, he said, "You've just dropped the World Cup, son." That was the turning point in the Super Six match which could easily have propelled Zimbabwe to the semi-finals at the cost of Australia.

But Australia's performance in the final was stupendous. It passed Pakistan's total of 132 in just 201 overs. In the process it helped re-ignite the betting issue in Pakistan

Today stories abound on the subject. But the current one doing the rounds in Pakistan is perhaps the most damaging. The finals raised suspicions of underhand deals through an Asian businessman of Bradford who stands to make 4.5 million pounds on Australia's victory. Whether this owner of a restaurant chain was hand in glove with the Pakistani players is of course open to question.

But the match-fixing and betting allegations already probed by Justice Qayyum may end more than the careers of four Pakistani players. If the report is accepted and published by the government, it could seriously affect Pakistani cricket as a whole. And, may be, it could rub off a little on Indian cricketers who were also allegedly into a racket that had earlier ensnared the likes of Shane Warne and Mark Waugh. •

Arijit Sen/Calcutta

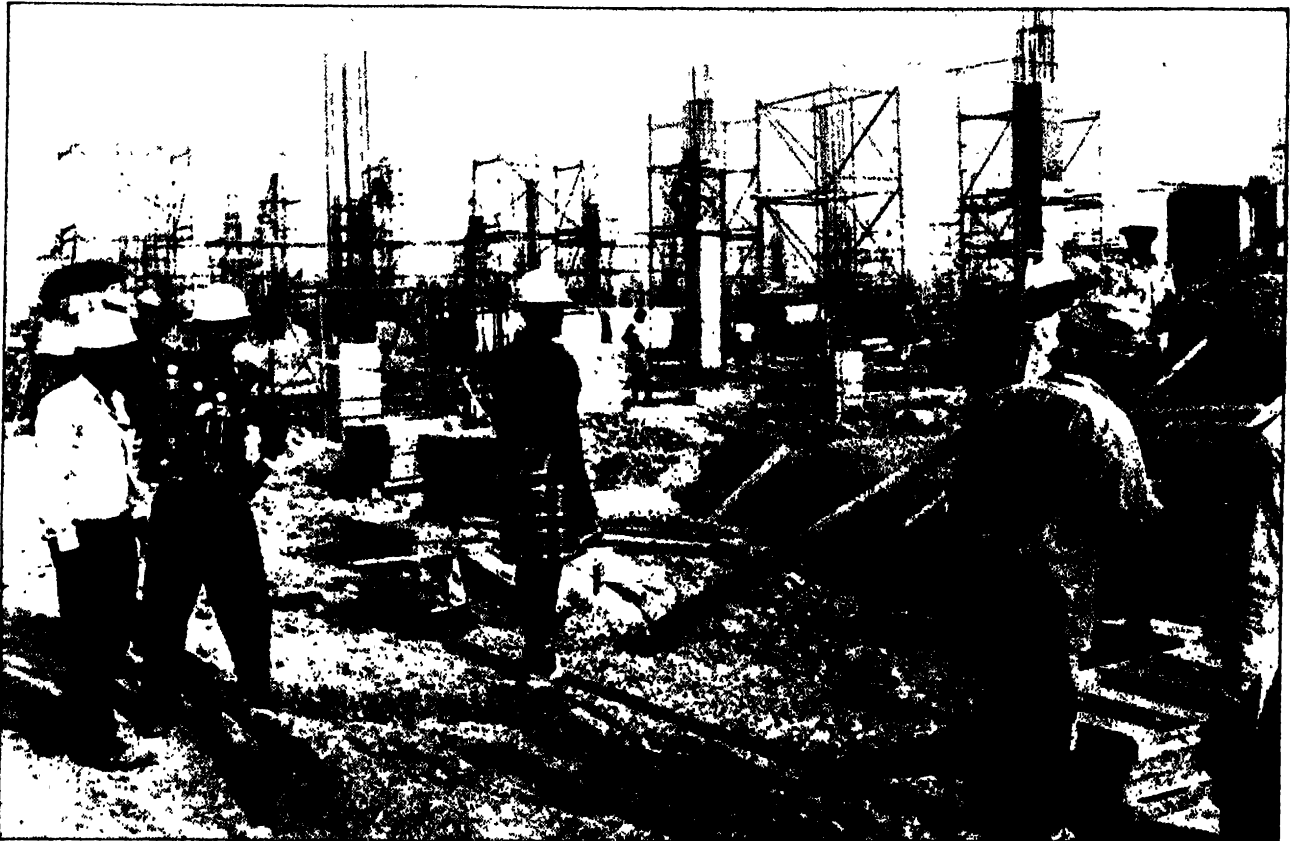
Sourav Ganguly and Rahul Dravid: world record



REHABILITATION

Broken promises

People evicted to make room for Haldia Petrochemicals are left in the lurch



FROM OPPORTUNITY TO THREAT: the project site at Haldia

TAPAN DAS

The CPI(M)'s trade union wing, CITU, recently organised a sit-in demonstration at the Haldia Petrochemical Project Limited (HPCL) — the showcase of West Bengal's Left Front government's industrialisation drive — ~~suspending all work and leading to~~ heavy financial loss. This incurred the wrath of industrialists, despite state home (police) minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's assurance that no further disturbance at HPCL would be allowed.

Trade union militancy, the first of its kind at HPCL, has kept the state government in a dilemma. The leaders apprehend that it might lead to disastrous consequences.

Lakshman Seth, the local CPI(M) MP and former chairman of the Haldia Development Authority, said that the people who had been evicted because of the project had not been given jobs as promised. He pointed out that even large multinational companies like Mitsubishi were providing jobs to oustees.

While the state government was acquiring land at Haldia, on different occasions including election campaigns, the CPI(M) had promised that HPCL would provide at least 1.5

lakh direct and indirect employment opportunities. But among the 5,000 families who had lost almost 50,000 acre of land, only 250 people have been given jobs so far, mostly as casual labourers.

The CITU leaders specifically criticised the "tendency" of the HPCL management to recruit people in blue-collar jobs from outside the state. They referred to a Supreme Court directive of 1987 to absorb locals in blue-collar jobs. Finance minister Asim Dasgupta reportedly took the initiative of finding out a solution and the state government requested the HPCL to look into the matter.

Trade union leaders pointed out to HPCL authorities that locals displaced from their land should be absorbed following the advice of a screening committee set up by the state government. So far, however, the HPCL had neither requested the screening committee to provide a list of displaced persons, nor forwarded any list of ousted people to the screening committee for finding prospective candidates for blue-collar jobs.

As a result, there is a feeling of disillusionment among the local people over the Left Front's promises on employment

opportunities, especially as there is no sign of downstream projects coming up as yet. The resentment came to the surface during the elections for the Sutamata Assembly seat in 1996, which the Front lost to the Congress.

Even the local Left leaders have come to conclude that there remains little employment opportunity at the petrochem project. Apprehending a setback in the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections, the local CPI(M) leaders have got busy to convince the oustees that they are still fighting for their cause.

But Seth said that they would like to continue their movement until the oustees' demands were fulfilled. Incidentally, he has been replaced as the chairman of the Haldia Development Authority by the state government following his involvement in the demonstrations, it is alleged.

Speaking to newsmen, HPCL chairman Tapan Mitra has assured that the principles relating to the absorption of HPCL oustees would be declared soon and that a fund of Rs 8 crore had been earmarked for rehabilitation purposes. He, however, mentioned that there was no promise of any permanent jobs. Mitra also stressed that HPCL was not a state-level project but an international one.

The project authorities were also looking for some non-governmental organisations which could take care of the rehabilitation of oustees as well as their training so that they could be employed as skilled workers.

The locals have little faith on these plans, though. Moreover, real estate agents are playing havoc in the area by purchasing land at throwaway rates in the name of building industries and selling them at 15 to 20 times the price.

The HPCL is a joint venture project comprising the Chatterjee Group of USA, the Tatas and the state government. Despite contributions by the three partners, about Rs 900 crore is still needed for completing the project. Doubts remain as to how this will be raised.

Meanwhile, industrialists are becoming disillusioned with the investor-friendly stance of the state government. A businessman associated with the project told SUNDAY: "The Left Front government fails to understand that politics has to be separated from industry." McKinsey, an international consultancy firm, has already warned the state government that investment and industrialisation in the West Bengal were being retarded because of red-tapism and political pressure. •

Ashle Basu/Calcutta

WEST BENGAL

The healing touch

Mothers' Clubs are improving the lives of tea garden workers

She wept as she told her tale. Muni Chikbarai, dark and 50, with eyes that shine despite her age, said she was being harassed each day by people in the coolie lines. She picks tea leaves in the Goodricke garden of Danguajhar in Jalapaiguri district in the Dooars region of West Bengal. Her neighbours think she is a witch.

And that is a dangerous, and often fatal, thing to happen to anyone.

Official records show that between 1990 and 1995, 51



SUPPORT SYSTEM: Muni Chikbarai (centre) with Mothers' Club activists

people were killed in the Dooars after being branded as 'witches'. Although the number of killings has come down in the last four years, the problem still persists, and Chikbarai fears for her future.

In recent times, however, Mothers' Clubs, formed in about 125 tea gardens in the Dooars area, have partially improved matters. Relentless campaigns against superstitions by these women's organisations, each formed with 15-20 female workers, have helped others see reason.

Mothers' Clubs were originally formed under UNICEF and UNEP's integrated parasite control and family welfare project for the tea gardens. Its aim was to improve the health conditions of tea garden workers and their children, with an emphasis on women, who formed 50 per cent of the workforce.

As health consciousness among the workers grew because of Mothers' Club initiatives and better medical facilities provided by the management, incidents of witch-hunting began to

Trade winds

Experts call for greater exchange between Bangladesh and the north-east

The demand for enhancing border trade with Bangladesh is gaining momentum in Tripura. More specifically, there is a demand for trade between Bangladesh and the north-eastern states of India. Recently, Tripura chief minister Manik Sarkar has observed that good commercial and neighbourly relations should be established with Bangladesh for mutual benefit of north-eastern states.

In the recently-held meeting in Guwahati among the chief ministers of north-eastern states and the Union commerce minister, Ramakrishna Hegde, Sarkar said that the volume of border trade was related directly to the development of infrastructure. Sarkar wanted the central government to take up the question of transit through Bangladesh on a priority basis and to link all the north-eastern state capitals with railway lines. The ruling Left Front in Tripura has also demanded the immediate introduction of Agartala-Dhaka-Calcutta bus service. In a statement issued in Agartala recently, it was pointed out that such a service

decline. "We explain the causes of diseases in the coolie lines and fight superstitions. We have intervened in cases where someone has been declared a 'witch'," says Kamala Biswakarma, a member of the Mothers' Club in the Danguajhar garden.

Kamala is a garden worker. She has been picking tea for the last 27 years, while her husband has been working in the railways. Kamala says that old people are usually targeted and made out to be witches. "I came to this place after my marriage. I have been living here for many years. But now I have become old and suddenly people have begun to think that I am a witch," says Chikbarai. Members of the Mothers' Club have decided to take up Chikbarai's case.

The clubs have been immensely successful, says Samar Nath Chatterjee, former secretary of the Indian Tea Association and presently director of finance and marketing in the West Bengal Tea Development Corporation. "The response has been unprecedented. And the movement is now spreading to the Terai region," he says.

There has been a marked improvement in the conditions in the coolie lines, says Dr Ashok Kumar Maity, chief medical officer at the Goodricke's splendid little hospital at the Danguajhar garden. "There was a time when the workers didn't bother much about inoculations. Today, they see to it that their children are vaccinated on time. The workers also rush to hospital even for minor ailments," he says.

Clearly, motivating women have paid off. Garden sources said that fewer man-days have been lost in recent times due to sickness.

What's more, they have also learnt to sign their names after the club was formed. They run non-formal night classes for workers and their children. "In many cases, the father, mother and their children sit down to study in the same class," says Kamala Biswakarma.

That, indeed, is a big change. But the likes of Chikbarai are still living in the shadow of fear. •

Malabi Gupta/Jalpaiguri

was a long-cherished demand of the people of the state.

The Tripura Chamber of Commerce and the Industrial Development Bank of India recently organised a seminar on export and import between Bangladesh and Tripura. Industrialists from Bangladesh wanted the north-eastern

OPEN UP: Tripura CM Manik Sarkar



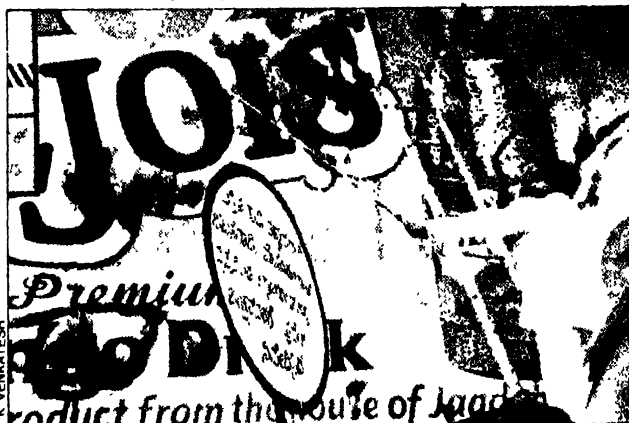
ASHOK CHANDRAN

KARNATAKA

The language question

A political party tries to wipe out English hoardings from Bangalore

When elections are round the corner, can political gimmickry be far behind? Bangalore had its share last week when hundreds of men led by Vatal Nagaraj, MLA and president of the Kannada Chaluvali Vatal Paksh (KCVP), went on a rampage, painting the city black. What KCVP lacked by way of political clout — it is a party with a



WON'T SPEAK: Vatal Nagaraj destroying hoardings written in English

region to be declared as free-trade zone and all restrictions like import and customs duties be withdrawn by the governments of both the countries as they felt that such measures would boost trade and industry in the region.

They said that imposition of high rates of export and import duties by the two countries is the major hurdle for regional trade and commerce. Officials of the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce pointed out that high rates of taxes paved the way for smuggling. As a result of smuggling, the opportunity of legalised trade between the countries were being hampered and the respective governments were losing heavily on account of tax receipts.

Officials also pointed out that uneven ratio of trade and commerce between the countries further complicated the process. Giving facts and figures of export and imports in 1998-99, it was pointed out that exports from India were far more than what India imported. Representatives of Sylhet, Moulavi Bazaar and Fenny Chambers of Commerce also spoke at the seminar.

Tripura industry minister Pabitra Kar pointed out that the state was rich in resources like natural gas, tea, rubber, pineapple and other fruits. He also urged industrialists from Bangladesh to explore the vast natural resources of the region. •

Kantala Chakrabarty/Agartala

Next change

After *Thoda Hai...* watch out for *Sparsh* from Ravi Rai

In a little '70s movie, which was all about people and relationships and feelings, *Thoda Hai Thode Ki Zaroorat* was a lovely little film. For the last couple of years, it has been the title of a Ravi Rai serial on Sony, which came to a close last week.

Rai's first major success, *Insitkhan*, proved that Renuka Shahane could enrage as well as smile. It made her a star for all seasons. It also proved that Rai was best when it came to TV fiction, which was touchy-feely as well as sensible. It was fiction which spoke of and for the middle classes, and it spoke well because it concentrated on decency and strong moral values instead of depravity and wickedness.

The Sultan on Top, which followed, cemented his reputation as a sensitive person, in touch with the time and the scene, and it paved the way for other stories, strong on emotion, and his penchant of working with familiar people, having cemented good working relationships with such actors as Prajakti Deshmukh, Alok Nath, Reeta Bhaduri, Rohini Hattangadi, Akshay Anand—all staples—and his favourite leading man, Sachin Khedekar.



SOMETHING TO SMILE ABOUT: Renuka Shahane

But things started to go a trifle off-kilter with the two serials which came on soon after *Teacher*, and *Thoda Hai...*. The leisurely, unhurried pace which seemed delightful in his early work—it felt true to the way time passes for most average households—slowed down to a dawdle. A character could begin a scene with a full cup of tea and still have some left at the end of the half-hour, while busying herself in a serious discourse about life and death and things of that nature. It all became too much of a muchness: tea-cups have to be drunk to the dregs, or discarded.

No one's telling Mr Rai to adopt MTV-style because what he's trying to do is almost always pleasing, and we do have reasonable attention spans. But he really should focus on getting on with, thus creating a happy situation where his characters can be as sensitive as they like, with an added spurt. And despite everything, we're looking forward to his new offering, *Sparsh*, which is ready and waiting for a slot. •

single MLA — was made up by enthusiasm shown by this rabble-rousing brigade.

Even as the passers-by looked on, the confused group of KCVP demonstrators went ahead with their demolition job. Undeterred by the presence of police or onlookers, Nagaraj thundred over the microphone that all name-plates and hoardings written in English would be abolished. The ones escaping the onslaught for now will not be spared for long, he pointed out.

To establish the fact that they mean business, hoardings and billboards were painted black. Some were even pulled down and burnt. By the end of the day, Nagaraj and his supporters destroyed nearly 1,000 name-plates and hoardings. "It was our last option as the owners of the hoardings which were only in English did not pay heed to our warning," said the charged-up MLA.

The onslaught on billboards was part of KCVP's on-going movement: the Save Kannada campaign. Earlier, Nagaraj had set 5 June as the deadline for removing hoardings in English. His supporters pointed out that their action was merely a result of not paying attention to a crucial issue.

"This was an unwanted act," says Srikant Murthy, spokesperson of the Lok Shakti party. "Bangalore is a cosmopolitan city. Besides, Karnataka is known for its tolerance and ability to coexist and this kind of approach is extremely short-sighted," he added.

Ideological reasons apart, there are many who are hit by the kind of rigid attitude displayed by Nagaraj and his supporters. Traders and advertisers are particularly in a fix. "We cater to foreign tourists most of the time and our publicity takes place generally through word of mouth," complained the owner of a sari shop. "How will we manage if the boards were to be written in Kannada as most people hear of us through friends and relatives," he wondered.

Their worries are not unreasonable. Shops located in the narrow by-lanes of the congested city markets face a lot of problem as most of the times their boards are the only landmark they have. For shopowners, it is a question of losing out on business opportunities. For the rest, it is just an inconvenience they could do without.

However, it is not the first time that the issue has come up. "The V.K. Gokak Enquiry Commission was set up way back in 1992," explained Srikanth Murthy. "It suggested that Kannada be made compulsory till the primary level. This decision was welcomed by all."

For Vatal Nagaraj, however, it is a purely emotional issue which most people brand as "Kannada chauvinism". Moderates feel that Kannada should be promoted through art and literature and not imposed upon people in such 'aggressive' and 'illogical' manner.

But Nagaraj's crusades seem to be bearing fruit. "Till 1967, we only had Tamil and Hindi movies in theatres," recalls Murthy. "However, after Vatal's crusade, more Kannada films were being shown," he pointed out.

The debate seems to be a never-ending one. What is worrying, however, is that serious issues are now being used to whip up emotions that can only lead to distancing people from one another.

And the irony is that most of those who speak of making Kannada compulsory are the ones who speak English when posing in front of television cameras for English news channels. •

Anuja Joshi/Bangalore



SUNDAY WEEK

KUSUM BHANDARI

BEGINNING 27 JUNE, 1999

ARIES

(21 March-20 April)

Certain things are probably best left unsaid. Play your cards close to the chest, especially where major decisions are concerned. Say nothing that can stir up controversy. Romantic urges may rise in the single and unattached. The need for a companion or partner may become more apparent.

TAURUS

(21 April-20 May)

Look for pleasure in the simple things of life. Make the most of the company around you. Conversing with acquaintances can be far more rewarding than you realize. Others may have instructive stories or valuable experience to pass on. Books can be a source of inspiration in this calm week.

GEMINI

(21 May-20 June)

It may now be essential to keep other people guessing. Letting too much out of the bag too soon can jeopardize your chance of success. Play your cards close to the chest. Wait for your plans to gather momentum before you inform others about your ideas. Extravagant impulses should be resisted.

CANCER

(21 June-20 July)

Don't jump to hasty conclusions on the basis of incomplete information. There is little chance that facts reported by others are accurate. Conflicting versions of the same story from different sources will make you very discriminating in what you believe.

LEO

(21 July-20 August)

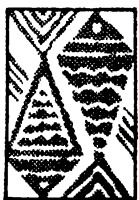
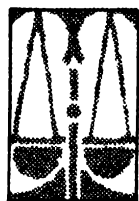
Don't take all that family or household members say as gospel truth. They may well have got hold of the wrong end of the stick even though they behave they are telling the truth. A breakdown of communication is likely over property affairs or rent agreements. Valuable items can be misplaced.



LIBRA

(21 September-20 October)

You should be reviewing recently made plans and decisions affecting financial affairs. Don't be frightened to change your mind in light of altered circumstances. But it is a different story in professional matters, where you should stick to your guns. Do not be put off by new obstacles.



SAGITTARIUS

(21 November-20 December)

Too much eagerness and drive may have the opposite effect from that desired. This week is started for taking your courage in both hands and making the first move in new romantic alliances. The fear of being rebuffed probably exists only in your own head. There will be no shortage of creative ideas.

CAPRICORN

(21 December-20 January)

Travel and errand-running is best kept to a minimum. A lot of running about will leave you flat on your back. Try setting your sights high in business operations. Valuable transactions can be carried through with large business organizations. People are likely to be most understanding.

AQUARIUS

(21 January-20 February)

It will be easier to make a wrong move in romantic affairs. You can tread on the toes of loved ones without realizing you are doing so. Treat your nearest and dearest and their belongings with the respect they deserve. You will be in an energetic mood, will be happier to be constructively engaged.

PISCES

(21 February-20 March)

Chance encounters with influential people are possible in social gatherings or in pursuing recreational activities. Useful advances can be made in business matters through such meetings. If you are spending time at home, you will have to do some domestic chores.

VIRGO

(21 August-20 September)

Keep an open mind to new business proposals. It would be wise to do some background research before committing yourself to new opportunities, but prospects seem good. Pooling equipment and expertise can mean a large increase in overall productivity.

SCORPIO

(21 October-20 November)

New ventures and initiatives are likely to get off to a lively start. You may be offered a share enterprises just begun by friends and associates. Attempts to force the pace or hurry people up will only lead to delay and may make them stubborn.

Missing her

Now that finance secretary Vijay Kelkar is going to Washington, the one person he won't have a chance of running into is Sridevi.

Why, you might ask. Because about six months ago, Kelkar was so fascinated by Sridevi that he couldn't bear to leave her side.



Sridevi: official charmer

It happened at a party thrown by a prominent politician. Kelkar was one of the first to arrive and the last to leave. Throughout the evening, he was hovering around the actress.

Not that Kelkar is to be blamed. He is just one more among a series of government officials to be ensnared by Sridevi's charm: K.P.S. Gill was the first.

New masters

Ram (Jethmalani) may have gone to the law ministry but his Hanuman (K.J. Alphonse) continues to stay on in the ministry of urban development.

It may be recalled that Alphonse was appointed Jethmalani's PS in not entirely propitious circumstances.

HEARD IN NEW DELHI

There was a time when the Air-India Maharaj used to say 'Come fly with me.' Today the government should change that to 'Come fry with me.'

AN INTERNATIONAL PASSENGER ON THE STATE OF AIR-INDIA, AFTER AIR-CONDITIONING IN AN AI AIRCRAFT FAILED

Alphonse had wanted to contest the Lok Sabha elections to clean up the system but had been dissuaded from doing so by Jethmalani who had asked him to work for him.

The duo was in and out of controversy, with Alphonse responsible for a lot of the trouble that Jethmalani found himself in when he clashed with the urban development secretary, Kiran Aggarwal.

Now, although Jethmalani's other man Friday Mahesh has gone to the law ministry, Alphonse continues to hold his old job.



K.J. Alphonse: hard to fit in under the new minister, Jagmohan. As Jagmohan is a tough taskmaster, fur is bound to fly. Watch this space for more.

All that glitters

The finance ministry and the commerce ministry are locked in yet another battle (yawn).

This time over the inclusion of gold and silver on the list of special import licence (SIL).

There was a time when gold prices in India were much higher than the international market. This resulted in a great deal of smuggling. In fact, only one-tenth of all the gold used in India came through legal channels.

When gold was decontrolled in the early Nineties and an import duty of Rs 22 per 10 gm levied, smuggling virtually stopped. So revenue began to increase. Then last year, government increased the import duty to Rs 40 per 10 gm. So the speculative and illegal channel was activated once again and revenue began dropping.

Now the commerce ministry wants to put gold on the SIL which commands a premium and will constitute an export incentive. The finance ministry says this will only encourage speculation and smuggling and will affect revenue. How? asks the commerce ministry. It just will, says the finance ministry.

And so it goes on. •

CHECK-LIST

Who will be the next finance secretary?

■ **P.G. Mankad:** The information secretary is the topper of his batch and the most favoured to get the job. A gentle, courteous man who always returns calls, Mankad is the perfect bureaucrat — he stays invisible but never compromises.

■ **Y.V. Reddy:** Deputy governor of the Reserve Bank, Reddy is low-profile and brilliant. Has been victimised in the finance ministry. He was second in his batch of the IAS and is a favoured contender, though he's providing sterling service where he is.

■ **N.K. Singh:** Currently in the PMO as adviser to the Prime Minister, Singh is not at all low-profile and is known as a doer. He's in charge of the telecommunications negotiations. Has wanted the finance secretaryship for a long time. However, he's lower in seniority. Probably not getting the job, mainly because he is feared for his cleverness.

■ **E.A.S. Sarma:** The dark horse. The current revenue secretary, there is a chance that he may make a lateral move. However, he will get the job only if there is a tie between Mankad and Reddy.

One of a kind

Defence minister George Fernandes is a strange kind of a politician. He doesn't seem to take any cognisance of statements issued against him.

Some days ago, former Prime Minister I.K. Gujral wrote a letter to the Prime Minister which was obligingly released to the press. In

HEARD IN THE CABINET SECRETARIAT

The Pakistanis thought they had the war taped up. How right they were.

A BUREAUCRAT ON THE INCRIMINATING TAPES OF CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN THE PAK ARMY CHIEF AND HIS COLLEAGUE

Boeing, because in terms of protocol he is one notch above the Prime Minister. And if the PM could take an empty Boeing on a state trip, so could he.

So, a Boeing made the trip to South Africa in the service of the vice-president. And who cares about the money spent.



George Fernandes: who cares?

this letter, he said that though Fernandes was his friend, he wanted him shifted to some other ministry because he was "temperamentally unsuited" to be defence minister.

Anyone else would either have issued a counter-statement, or privately taken up the matter with Gujral. But Fernandes did neither. Instead he called on Gujral, going to his house to explain something or the other to him. He says the matter of the letter "was not mentioned, neither by me nor by him".

And why not? He didn't say.

Some people enjoy masochism. Maybe Fernandes is one of them.

Boeing to South Africa

You have to say this for the vice-president of India, Krishan Kant. He is a stickler for protocol.

Take his trip to South Africa last week. Six journalists were to accompany him on the trip, largely ceremonial, for the swearing-in of Thabo Mbeki, South Africa's new President. The total number of people on the trip was not more than 20.

With just a handful of people aboard, it made sense to take a small plane. But no, his office insisted he take a



M.S. Gill: enjoying his position

Changed times

Chief election commissioner Dr M.S. Gill is enjoying his exalted station in life. It must be nice to have a captive audience of important people in government hanging on to every word you say. But this wasn't always so. And not so long ago either.

When he was chemicals secretary, he was invited to the residence of an important industrialist. So were some other politicians.

It was an intimate party and drinks were being had. One of the politicians was holding an empty glass. The industrialist told Dr Gill: "Arrey, his glass is *khali* (empty)." So, Dr Gill, courteous and obedient to the last, got up and poured a drink for the guest.

Now the boot is on the other leg.

CHECK-LIST

The Rajiv Gandhi assassination: the new probe

■ **The story till now:** The Verma Commission fixed responsibility for the security lapses which led to Rajiv Gandhi's assassination. The Jain Commission reported that the LTTE and other forces entered a conspiracy to have Rajiv murdered.

■ **The turning point:** The Supreme Court confirmed the death sentence on some of the accused and exonerated others. One of the accused who was let off implicated Chandra Swami in the assassination plot.

■ **What the CBI wants to do:** It wants to investigate some aspects of the case afresh. It has been permitted to do so by the High Court in Tamil Nadu.

■ **What about the NIDMA:** The Multi-Disciplinary Monitoring Agency which was to work out exactly how the LTTE built up its network, seems to be inactive.

■ **Can India ever nab the killers?** Not until the government captures V. Prabhakaran, the LTTE supremo, for he was at the head of the conspiracy.

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